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"NAVARRE! NAVARRE! CAHORS IS OURS! LONG LIVE NAVARRE!"

THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

HENRY OF NAVARRE

(PART II., THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN)

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
LV.	How the King of Navarre acted the First Time he saw Firing	407
LVI.	What took Place at the Louvre about the Same Time that Chicot entered the Town of Nérac	415
LVII.	Red Plume and White Plume . . .	426
LVIII.	The Door opens	433
LIX.	How a Great Lady loved in the Year of Grace 1586	439
LX.	How Sainte Maline entered the Tower, and what followed . . .	451
LXI.	What took Place in the Mysterious House	459
LXII.	The Laboratory	466
LXIII.	What Monseigneur Francis of France, the Duc d'Anjou, and De Brabant, Count of Flanders, were doing . .	471
LXIV.	Preparations for Battle	480
LXV.	Monseigneur	489
LXVI.	Monseigneur — (*Continued*)	495
LXVII.	French and Flemish	501
LXVIII.	The Travellers	512
LXIX.	Explanation	518
LXX.	The Water	526
LXXI.	The Flight	533
LXXII.	Transfiguration	543
LXXIII.	The Two Brothers	547
LXXIV.	The Expedition	554
LXXV.	Paulus Æmilius	561
LXXVI.	A Memory of the Duc d'Anjou . . .	568
LXXVII.	Seduction	580
LXXVIII.	The Journey	589
LXXIX.	How King Henry III. did not invite Crillon to Breakfast, and how Chicot invited himself	594

CHAPTER		PAGE
LXXX.	How after having received News from the South Henry Received More from the North	605
LXXXI.	The Two Comrades	614
LXXXII.	La Corne d'Abondance	620
LXXXIII.	What happened in the Small Room of Maître Bonhomet's Inn . . .	625
LXXXIV.	The Husband and the Lover . . .	640
LXXXV.	How Chicot began to see clearly through the Letter from Monsieur de Guise	647
LXXXVI.	The Cardinal de Joyeuse	654
LXXXVII.	News from Aurilly	662
LXXXVIII.	Doubt	667
LXXXIX.	Certainty	674
XC.	Fatality	681
XCI.	The Hospitallers	687
XCII.	His Highness Monseigneur le Duc de Guise	695

CHAPTER LV.

HOW THE KING OF NAVARRE ACTED THE FIRST TIME HE SAW FIRING.

The small army advanced to within cannon shot of the city; there they breakfasted.

The meal over, two hours were given the officers and soldiers in which to rest. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, that is, there remained scarcely two hours of daylight when the king had the officers summoned to his tent.

Henry was very pale, and while he gesticulated, his hands shook so visibly that their fingers dropped like gloves hung up to dry.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have come to take Cahors; we must take Cahors, therefore, since we have come for that purpose; but Cahors must be taken by force; force, you understand? that is, by driving in steel and wood with the flesh."

"Not bad," said Chicot, who was listening critically, "and if his gestures did not belie his words one could scarcely ask for anything else, even from Monsieur Crillon."

"Monsieur le Maréchal de Biron," continued Henry, "le Maréchal de Biron, who has sworn to have the last Huguenot hung, holds the country forty-five leagues from here. In all probability a messenger has already been despatched to him by Monsieur de Vesin. In four or five days he will be at our back; he will have ten thousand men with him; we shall be captured between him and the city. Let us then take Cahors before he arrives, and receive him as Monsieur de Vesin is prepared to receive us, but with a better fortune, I trust. In the contrary case, at least, he will have some good Catholic beams on which to hang the Huguenots, and we certainly owe him this satisfaction. Come, cheer up, cheer up, gentlemen, I will put myself at your head and, *ventre Saint Gris!* give blows, blows as though it were hailing."

This was all of the royal harangue; but it was enough, apparently, for the soldiers responded to it by enthusiastic murmurs, and the officers by frantic applause.

"A fine talker, but a Gascon still," said Chicot, aside. "How lucky it is that we do not speak with our hands! *Ventre de biche!* the Béarnais would have stammered terribly; besides, we shall see this one at work."

The little army set out under the command of Mornay to take its position.

Just as it began to march, the king came to Chicot:

"Pardon me, friend Chicot," said he, "I deceived you by talking of a hunt — of wolves and other nonsense; but really I had to do it, and it is your own idea, since you told it to me in so many words. Evidently King Henry does not wish to pay the dowry of his sister Margot, and Margot is crying and weeping for her dear Cahors. We must do what our wives wish in order to have peace in our household; so I am going to try and take Cahors, my dear Chicot."

"Why did she not ask you for the moon, sire, since you are such a kind husband," replied Chicot, piqued at the royal jokes.

"I should have tried to get it, Chicot," said the Béarnais; "I love her so dearly, this dear Margot!"

"Oh! you have quite enough with Cahors, and we shall see how you get out of it."

"Ah! that is exactly what I wanted to come to; listen, friend Chicot; the moment is supreme, and above all disagreeable. Ah! I am no great swordsman myself. I am not brave, and my nature revolts at every musket shot. Chicot, my friend, do not make too much fun of the poor Béarnais, your countryman and your friend; if I am afraid and you should notice it, do not say so."

"If you are afraid, you say?"

"Yes."

"You are afraid, then, of being afraid?"

"Without doubt."

"But then, *ventre de biche!* if that is your nature, why the devil, do you meddle in all these affairs?"

"But suppose it is necessary?"

"Monsieur de Vesin is a terrible man."

"I well know it, by heaven!"

"Who gives quarter to no one."

"You think so, Chicot?"

"Oh! I am sure of it, so far as that is concerned; red plume or white plume makes little difference to him; he will cry to the guns: 'Fire!'"

"You say that for my white plume, Chicot?"

"Yes, sire, and as you are the only one who has one of that color" —

"Well?"

"I would advise you to take it off, sire."

"But, my friend, since I wore it so that I might be recognized, if I were to take it off" —

"Well?"

"Well, my object would fail, Chicot."

"You will keep it, then, sire, notwithstanding my advice."

"Yes, certainly I will keep it."

On uttering these words, which indicated a fixed resolution, Henry trembled still more visibly than while haranguing his officers.

"Come," said Chicot, who understood nothing of this double manifestation, so different in word and gesture; "come, there is time still, sire, do not do anything foolish; you cannot mount your horse in this condition."

"I am very pale, then, Chicot?" asked Henry.

"Pale as death, sire."

"Good," said the king.

"Why good?"

"Yes, I understand myself."

Just then the noise of cannon from the fortress was heard, accompanied by the furious sound of musketry; it was Monsieur de Vesin answering the summons to surrender sent him by Duplessis Mornay.

"Well!" said Chicot, "what do you think of that music?"

"I think that it makes a devilish shiver run through my bones," replied Henry. "Come, my horse, my horse!" cried he, in a voice as abrupt and brittle as the spring of a clock.

Chicot looked at him and listened to him without comprehending anything of the strange phenomenon which was developing under his eyes.

Henry sprang into the saddle, but he had to make two attempts.

"Come, Chicot," said he, "mount too; you are no more of a warrior than I am, hey?"

"No, sire."

"Well! come, Chicot, we will be afraid together; come and see the firing, my friend, come. A good horse for Monsieur Chicot!"

Chicot shrugged his shoulders, and without moving a muscle, mounted a fine Spanish horse which was brought him by order of the king. Henry put his horse to a gallop; Chicot followed him. Upon arriving in front of his small army Henry raised the visor of his helmet.

"Out with the flag! bring out the new flag!" cried he in a tremulous voice.

They drew off the case, and the new flag, with its double escutcheon of Navarre and Bourbon, unfolded proudly in the breeze; it was white, and showed golden chains on the azure of one side, and on the other, golden fleur-de-lis with the label placed *en cœur*.

"There," said Chicot, aside, "is a flag which will be badly torn, I fear."

Just then, and as though in answer to Chicot's thought, the cannon of the fortress thundered forth, and opened an entire row in the infantry ten feet from the king.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" said he, "did you see, Chicot? It is in earnest, it seems to me."

And his teeth chattered.

"He is going to be ill," said Chicot.

"Ah!" murmured Henry. "Ah! you are afraid, cursed carcass. You shake, you tremble; wait, wait, I will make you tremble for something."

And driving the spurs into the flanks of the white horse which he rode, he outstripped cavalry, infantry, and artillery, and arrived within a hundred feet of the fortress, red from the fire of the batteries, which were thundering from the top of the rampart like the noise of a tempest, and which was reflected on his armor like the rays of the setting sun. There he held his horse motionless for ten minutes, his face turned towards the gate of the city, crying:

"The fascines, *ventre Saint Gris!* the fascines!"

Mornay had followed him, with visor raised and sword in hand.

Chicot followed Mornay; he had allowed them to put a cuirass on him, but he did not draw his sword.

Behind these three men dashed the young Huguenot gentlemen, inspired by the example, crying and shouting:

"Long live Navarre!"

The Vicomte de Turenne rode at their head, a fascine on the neck of his horse.

Chicot came up and hurled his fascine; in an instant the ditch dug under the drawbridge was filled up.

The artillery rushed forward, and, by losing thirty men out of forty, they succeeded in placing their petards under the gate.

The grape-shot and musketry whistled around Henry like a hurricane of fire; in an instant twenty men fell before his eyes.

"Forward! forward!" he cried; and he urged his horse into the midst of the artillery.

He reached the edge of the ditch just as the first petard had exploded.

The gate was broken in two pieces.

The artillery lighted the second petard.

This made a new gap in the wood; but at once twenty muskets were passed through the triple opening, and vomited forth balls upon soldiers and officers.

The men fell around the king, mowed down like ears of corn.

"Sire," said Chicot, not thinking of himself, "sire, for Heaven's sake retire!"

Mornay said nothing; but he was proud of his pupil, and from time to time strove to place himself in front of him; but Henry waved him aside with a nervous shake of the hand. Suddenly Henry felt that the perspiration was dropping from his forehead, and that a mist was passing before his eyes.

"Ah! cursed nature!" he cried; "it shall not be said that you conquered me!"

Then jumping from his horse:

"A hatchet!" he cried, "a hatchet!"

And with a strong arm he cut down muzzles of guns, fragments of oak, and iron nails.

Finally a beam gave way, the side of a gate, the side of a wall, and a hundred men rushed into the breach crying:

"Navarre! Navarre! Cahors is ours! Long live Navarre!"

Chicot had not left the king; he was with him under the arch of the gate, which Henry had been one of the first to enter, but at every musket shot he saw him tremble violently and lower his head.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" cried Henry, furious. "Have you ever seen such cowardice, Chicot."

"No, sire," replied the latter, "I have never seen such a coward as you are; it is frightful."

At that moment the soldiers of Monsieur de Vesin attempted to unseat Henry and his advance-guard, stationed under the gate and in the surrounding houses.

Henry met them sword in hand.

But the besieged were the stronger; they succeeded in driving back Henry and his men beyond the ditch.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" exclaimed the king. "I think my flag is retreating; in that case, I will carry it myself."

And by a supreme effort, he snatched the standard from the hands of the one who was carrying it, raised it into the air, and half enveloped in its waving folds returned the first one to the fortress.

"Be afraid, then!" said he; "tremble now, coward!"

The balls whistled and flattened themselves against his armor with a jarring noise and perforated the flag with a dull, heavy sound.

Messieurs de Turenne, Mornay, and a thousand others rushed into this open gate, dashing after the king.

The cannon was quiet on the outside; henceforth it was face to face, man to man, that they were to fight.

Above the din of arms was heard the noise of the muskets, the clashing of the iron, and Monsieur de Vesin crying out: "Barricade the streets! dig ditches! make battlements of the houses!"

"Oh!" said Monsieur de Turenne, who was near enough to overhear it; "the siege of the city is over, my poor Vesin!"

And, as an accompaniment to the words, he sent a pistol shot which wounded the latter in the arm.

"You are mistaken, Turenne, you are mistaken," replied Monsieur de Vesin "there are twenty sieges in Cahors; so even if you have succeeded in one, there still remain nineteen."

Monsieur de Vesin defended himself for five days and five nights, from street to street and house to house.

Luckily for the rising fortune of Henry of Navarre, he had counted too much on the walls and the garrison of Cahors, so that he had neglected to warn Monsieur de Biron.

For five days and five nights Henry commanded like a captain and fought like a soldier; for five days and five nights he slept with his head on a stone, and awoke hatchet in hand.

Each day they gained a street, a fortress, a square; each night the garrison strove to retake the conquest of the day.

At length on the fifth day, the enemy, harassed, seemed to give some rest to the Protestant army. It was Henry who attacked it in turn; they forced an intrenched post, which cost seven hundred men; almost all the good officers were wounded in it. Monsieur de Turenne was shot by a musket in the shoulder. Mornay received a stone on the head, and just escaped being killed.

The king alone was not hit; a feverish agitation, an almost unconscious audacity, had succeeded the fear which he had felt at first, and which he had so heroically conquered. All the fastenings of his armor were broken, as much by his own efforts as by the attacks of his enemies; he struck so fiercely that a blow from him never wounded a man, it killed him.

When this last post was forced, the king entered the *enceinte*, followed by the eternal Chicot, who, silent and gloomy, for five days had been seeing with despair the startling phantom of a monarchy rising at his side destined to overthrow that of the Valois.

"Well! what do you think of it, Chicot?" said the king, raising the visor of his hemlet, and seeming to read the very soul of the poor ambassador.

"Sire," murmured Chicot, sadly, "I think that you are a true king."

"And I, sire," exclaimed Mornay, "I say that you are an imprudent one; what! gauntlets off, and visor raised, when they fire at you from all sides, and see, another shot!"

In short, at that moment, a ball whistled by, cutting one of the plumes on Henry's crest. At the same instant, and as though to prove Mornay in the right, the king was surrounded by a dozen gunners from the special troop of the governor.

They had been hidden there by Monsieur de Vesin, and had fired low and accurately. The king's horse was killed, that of Mornay had its leg broken. The king fell; ten swords were raised above him.

Chicot alone remained standing; he sprang from his horse, threw himself before the king, and with his rapier made so rapid a movement that he waved aside the most advanced.

Then raising Henry, who was entangled in the harness of his horse, he led his own mount to him and said:

"Sire, you will prove to the King of France that if I have drawn sword against him, I have at least harmed no one."

Henry called Chicot to him, and embraced him with tears in his eyes.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" said he, "you shall belong to me, Chicot; you shall live and die with me, my child! Come, my service is as good as my heart!"

"Sire," replied Chicot, "I have but one service to follow in this world, that of my prince. Alas! he is diminishing in lustre, but I will be faithful in adverse fortune, I who scorned prosperity. Let me, therefore, serve and love my King as long as he lives. Sire, I shall soon be with him, so do not envy him his last servant."

"Chicot," replied Henry, "I claim your promise; you hear? you are dear and precious to me, and after Henry of France, you shall have Henry of Navarre for a friend."

"Yes, sire," replied Chicot, simply, respectfully kissing the hand of the king.

"Now you see, my friend," said the king, "Cahors is ours. Monsieur de Vesin will kill all his men there; but rather than retreat, I would kill all mine."

The threat was useless and Henry had no need to remain obstinate any longer. His troops, led by Monsieur de Turenne, had just carried the garrison. Monsieur de Vesin was captured.

The city surrendered.

Henry took Chicot by the hand and led him to a house, which burned, and riddled from balls, served him as general quarters; and here he dictated a letter to Monsieur de Mornay, so that Chicot might carry it to the King of France.

This letter was written in poor Latin, and concluded with these words:

"*Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum. Cognosco meos devotos, nosce tuos. Chicotus cætera expediet.*"

Which practically signified:

"That which you told me has been very useful to me. I know my faithful servants; know yours. Chicot will tell you the rest."

"And now, friend Chicot," continued Henry, "embrace me, and be careful not to stain yourself, for, God forgive me! I am as bloody as a butcher. I would gladly offer you a part of the game, if I knew that you would accept it; but I see in your

eyes that you would refuse. However, here is my ring; I want you to take it; and now, adieu, Chicot, I will not detain you longer. Hasten to France, you will win success at court by relating what you have seen."

Chicot accepted the ring and left. It took him three days to persuade himself that he had not been dreaming, and that he had not awakened in Paris, before the window of his house, under which Monsieur de Joyeuse was giving his serenades.

CHAPTER LVI.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE LOUVRE ABOUT THE SAME TIME THAT CHICOT ENTERED THE TOWN OF NÉRAC.

The necessity which compelled us to follow our friend Chicot to the end of his mission has carried us somewhat away from the Louvre. For this we ask pardon of our readers. Yet it would not be just to omit any longer the details of the result of the plot of Vincennes, and the one who had been its object.

The King, after having so bravely passed through the danger, had experienced that retrospective emotion which the strongest hearts sometimes feel when the danger is over. He had therefore returned to the Louvre without saying anything. He had been a little longer than usual over his prayers, and, once given up to God, his fervor was so great that he had forgotten to thank the vigilant officers and devoted guards who had helped him escape from the peril.

Then he went to bed, astonishing his valets by the rapidity with which he made his toilet; one would have said that he was in haste to sleep in order that his ideas might be fresher and clearer for the following day.

So D'Épernon, who had remained last of all in the King's chamber, still expecting a word of thanks, had left in very bad humor, seeing that the thanks were not forthcoming.

And De Loignac, standing near the velvet portière, seeing Monsieur d'Épernon pass without uttering a word, turned abruptly to the Forty-Five and said to them:

"The King has no further need of you, gentlemen; you may go to bed."

By two o'clock that morning every one was sleeping at the Louvre.

The secret of the adventure was faithfully kept, and had nowhere leaked out. The good citizens of Paris therefore were conscientiously snoring without suspecting that they had touched with the tips of their fingers the accession to the throne of a new dynasty.

Monsieur d'Épernon had his boots taken off at once, and instead of strolling about the city with thirty horsemen or so, as was his habit, he followed the example given him by his illustrious master, and went to bed without speaking to any one.

De Loignac alone, who like the *justum et tenacem* of Horace, would not have been diverted from his duties by the fall of the world, De Loignac alone visited the posts of the Swiss, and of the French guards, who attended to their services with regularity but without excess of zeal. Three slight infractions of the laws of discipline were punished that night like serious faults. The next day, Henry, whose awakening was impatiently waited for by so many, took four cups of bouillon in bed, instead of the two which he usually took, and sent word to Monsieur d'O and Monsieur de Villequier that they were to come and work in his chamber at compiling a new financial edict.

The Queen received word to dine alone, and as she expressed, through a gentleman, some anxiety as to the health of his Majesty, Henry deigned to reply that he would receive the ladies that evening, and would have the collation in his cabinet.

The same answer was given to a gentleman of the queen mother, who for two years had been living in her hôtel at Soissons, but who sent daily to ask news of her son. The secretaries of state looked at one another with uneasiness. That morning the King was so absent-minded that their enormities in matters of extortion did not even bring a smile from his Majesty.

Now, absent-mindedness in a king is especially alarming for secretaries of state.

But, on the other hand, Henry played with Master Love, saying to him every time the animal squeezed his slender fingers between his little white teeth:

"Ah! Ah! rebel! you, too, want to bite me? Ah! Ah! little dog, you, too, attack your King? every one attempts this nowadays!"

Then Henry, with apparently as great efforts as Hercules, son of Alcimenes, used in order to subdue the Nemean lion, vanquished the monster as big as his fist by merely saying to him with indescribable satisfaction:

"Conquered, Master Love; conquered, you infamous Leaguer; Master Love, conquered! conquered! conquered!"

This was all that Messieurs d'O and Villequier, those two great diplomats who thought that no human secret could escape them, could catch on the wing. Except for these apostrophes to Master Love, Henry had been utterly silent.

If he had to sign, he signed; if he had to listen, he listened, closing his eyes so naturally that it was impossible to know whether he listened or slept.

At length three o'clock in the afternoon sounded.

The King sent for Monsieur d'Épernon.

He was told the duke was reviewing the light horse.

He demanded De Loignac.

They said that De Loignac was trying some Limousin horses.

They expected to see the King annoyed by this double check to his wish; not at all. Contrary to the general expectation, Henry, in the most careless manner in the world, began to whistle a hunting-song, a diversion to which he gave himself up only when perfectly satisfied with himself. It was evident that all the desire the King had had to keep silent since morning was changing into a growing longing to talk.

This longing finally became an irresistible need; but having no one, the King was obliged to talk all alone.

He demanded his luncheon, and while he ate had something edifying read to him, which he interrupted to say to the reader:

"It is Plutarch, is it not, who wrote the life of Sylla?"

The man, who was reading from the Scriptures, and who was interrupted by this profane question, turned to the King in astonishment.

The King repeated his question.

"Yes, sire," replied the reader.

"Do you recall the passage in which the historian relates how the dictator escaped death?"

The reader hesitated.

"Not exactly, sire," said he; "it is a long time since I read Plutarch."

At that moment they announced his eminence the Cardinal de Joyeuse.

"Ah! yes," cried the King, "here is a learned man, our friend, — he will tell us this without hesitating."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "am I fortunate enough to arrive at the right moment? that is a rare thing in this world."

"Faith, yes; you heard my question?"

"Your Majesty asked, I believe, how and under what circumstances the dictator Sylla escaped death?"

"Exactly. Can you answer me, cardinal?"

"Nothing is easier, sire."

"So much the better."

"Sylla, who had so many men put to death, sire, never risked losing his life except in combat. Does your Majesty allude to a combat?"

"Yes; and in one of the combats to which he exposed himself, I think I remember that he saw death close at hand. Open a Plutarch, if you please, cardinal; there should be one there, translated by that good Amyot, and read me this passage from the life of the Roman, in which, thanks to the speed of his white horse, he escaped the javelins of his enemies."

"Sire, there is no need to open Plutarch for that; the episode occurred in the combat in which he engaged with Teleserius, the Samnite, and Lamponius, the Lucanian."

"You ought to know that better than any one, my dear cardinal, you are so well read!"

"Your Majesty is really too good to me," replied the cardinal, bowing.

"Now," said the King, after a short pause, "now explain to me how the Roman lion who was so cruel was never disturbed by his enemies."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "I will answer your Majesty by one word from this same Plutarch."

"Answer, Joyeuse, answer."

"Carbon, the enemy of Sylla, often said: 'I have to fight at the same time a lion and a fox which dwell in the soul of Sylla; but it is the fox which gives me the greater trouble.'"

"Ah! yes, yes," replied Henry, dreamily, "it was the fox?"

"Plutarch says so, sire."

"And he is right," said the King, "he is right, cardinal. But speaking of a combat, have you received news from your brother?"

"Which one, sire? Your Majesty knows that I have four."

"I mean the Duc d'Arques, my friend."

"Not yet, sire."

"I wish that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, who, until now, has known so well how to act the fox, would now know a little how to act the lion!" said the King.

The cardinal did not reply, for this time Plutarch was no help to him; like a clever courtier, he feared to answer the King disagreeably by answering pleasantly for the Duc d'Anjou.

Henry, seeing that the cardinal was silent, returned to his battles with Master Love; then, signing to the cardinal to remain, he arose, dressed himself sumptuously, and passed into his cabinet, where his court was waiting for him.

It is especially at court that one feels with the same instinct one finds in mountaineers the approach or the end of storms: without any one's having spoken, without any one's having seen the King, every one was ready for the event.

The two queens were visibly uneasy. Catharine, pale and anxious, bowed a great deal and spoke in a short, jerky manner.

Louise de Vaudemont looked at no one and listened to nothing.

There were moments when the poor young woman seemed losing her reason.

The King entered.

His eyes were bright and his complexion rosy; one could read on his face a look of good humor which produced on all those gloomy countenances, waiting for a sight of his, the effect which a sunbeam produces on groves turned yellow by the autumn.

All at once became golden and purple; in an instant everything was resplendent.

Henry kissed the hand of his mother and that of his wife with the same gallantry as if he were still the Duc d'Anjou. He addressed a thousand flattering remarks to the ladies, who were not accustomed to conversation of this kind, and even went so far as to offer them sugar-plums.

"We were anxious concerning your health, my son," said Catharine, looking at the King with close attention, as though to assure herself that his complexion was not rouge, and his good humor not a mask.

"And you were wrong, madame," replied the King. "I never felt better."

He accompanied the words with a smile which passed to every lip.

"And to what happy influence, my son," demanded Catharine, with ill-concealed anxiety, "do you owe this improvement in your health?"

"To the fact of my having laughed a very great deal, madame," replied the King.

They all looked at one another in such great surprise that it seemed as if the King had just uttered an absurdity.

"Laughed a very great deal? You are able to laugh a very great deal, my son?" said Catharine, with her austere look; "in that case, you are very fortunate."

"That is what I am, madame."

"And what cause permitted you to attain such hilarity?"

"I must tell you, mother, that last evening I went to the forest of Vincennes."

"I knew it."

"Ah! you knew it?"

"Yes, my son; everything that concerns you is of interest to me; I tell you nothing new."

"No, undoubtedly; but I went to the forest of Vincennes, and on my return my light horse pointed out an enemy's army, the muskets of which were gleaming on the road."

"An enemy's army on the road from Vincennes?"

"Yes, mother."

"Where?"

"Opposite the pond of the Jacobins, near the house of our good cousin."

"Near the house of Madame de Montpensier?" cried Louise de Vaudemont.

"Exactly; yes, madame, near Bel Esbat. I approached bravely in order to engage in battle, and perceived" —

"My God! continue, sire," cried the queen, really worried.

"Oh, reassure yourself."

Madame Catharine waited anxiously, but neither a word nor a gesture betrayed her restlessness.

"I perceived," continued the King, "a whole priory of good monks who presented arms before me with belligerent shouts."

Cardinal de Joyeuse began to laugh; the entire court improved on this manifestation.

"Oh!" said the King, "laugh, laugh, you are right, for it will long be talked about. I have more than ten thousand monks in France, of whom, if need be, I shall make ten thousand musketeers; then I will create an office of grand master of the Shaven Musketeers of his very Christian Majesty, and I will give it to you, cardinal."

"Sire, I will take it; any service would be acceptable to me, provided that it pleased your Majesty."

During the conversation between the King and the cardinal the ladies, according to the etiquette of the times, had risen, and, one by one, saluted the King and left the room; the Queen followed them with her maids of honor.

The queen mother alone remained; there had been a mystery in the unusual gayety of the King which she wished to fathom.

"Ah! cardinal," suddenly said the King to the prelate, who was preparing to leave, seeing that the queen mother remained and guessing that she wished to speak to her son; "by the way, what has become of your brother Du Bouchage?"

"Why, sire, I do not know."

"What! you do not know?"

"No, I seldom see him, or rather I never see him any more," replied the cardinal.

A sad, serious voice resounded from the further end of the apartment.

"Here I am, sire," said this voice.

"Ah! it is he!" cried Henry. "Come here, count, come here."

The young man obeyed.

"Well, good God!" said the King, looking at him in astonishment; "on my honor as a gentleman, you are no longer a body but a walking skeleton."

"Sire, he works a great deal," stammered the cardinal, himself aghast at the change which eight days had wrought in the bearing and on the face of his brother.

In short, Du Bouchage was as pale as a wax statue, and his figure, beneath the silk and embroidery, partook of the rigidity and the tenuity of shadows.

"Come here, young man," said the King to him; "come here. Thanks, cardinal, for your quotation from Plutarch; in a similar case I promise always to apply to you."

The cardinal guessed that the King desired to be alone with Henry, and withdrew quietly.

The King watched him go from the corner of his eye, then turned his glance on his mother, who stood motionless.

There remained in the room only the queen mother, Monsieur d'Épernon, who was saying a thousand pretty speeches to her, and Du Bouchage.

At the door stood De Loignac, half courtier, half soldier, attending to his duty rather than to anything else.

The King seated himself and signed to Du Bouchage to approach.

"Count," said he to him, "why do you hide in this way behind the ladies? Do you not know that it pleases me to see you?"

"These kind words are a great honor for me, sire," replied the young man, bowing with profound respect.

"And, count, how comes it that we see you no more at the Louvre?"

"You see me no more, sire?"

"No, truly, and I was complaining to your brother, the cardinal, who is even more learned than I had supposed."

"If your Majesty does not see me," said Henry, "it is because you have not deigned to turn your eyes to the corner of this room. Sire, I am here every day at the hour when the King appears. In the same way I am present regularly when your Majesty rises, and I always respectfully salute you when you leave the council. Never have I missed doing so, and never shall I miss, so long as I am able to stand up, for it is a sacred duty to me."

"And it is this that makes you so sad," said Henry, kindly.

"Oh! your Majesty cannot think so."

"No, you and your brother love me."

"Sire!"

"And I love you also. By the way, you know that poor Anne has written me from Dieppe."

"I was not aware of the fact, sire."

"Yes, but you were not ignorant of the fact that he was heartbroken at going away."

"He told me of his regret at leaving Paris."

"Yes, but do you know what he told me? That there was a man who would have regretted Paris much more, and that if this command were given you, you would die."

"Perhaps, sire."

"He told me more, for your brother says many things, when he is not sulky; he told me that, in such a case, you would have disobeyed me; is this true?"

"Sire, your Majesty was right in putting my death before my disobedience."

"But after all, if you had not died of grief at the orders for leaving?"

"Sire, it would be more terrible suffering for me to obey than to die; and yet," added the young man, lowering his pale face as though to hide his embarrassment, "I should have disobeyed."

The King folded his arms and looked at Joyeuse.

"Ah!" said he, "why, you are partly mad, it seems to me, my poor count."

The young man smiled sadly.

"Oh! I am wholly so, sire," said he, "and your Majesty is wrong in sparing my condition."

"Then it is serious, my friend."

Joyeuse stifled a sigh.

"Tell me about it; come."

The young man carried his heroism as far as a smile.

"A great king such as you are, sire, cannot stoop to confidences like this."

"Yes, Henry, yes," said the King; "speak, tell me, you will amuse me."

"Sire," replied the young man, with pride, "your Majesty is mistaken; I must tell you there is nothing in my sorrow which can amuse a noble heart."

The King took the young man's hand.

"Come, come," said he, "do not be angry, Du Bouchage; you know that your King has known the pain of unrequited affection."

"I know it, yes. Sire, once" —

"I will sympathize, therefore, with your suffering."

"That is too much kindness on the part of a king."

"No; listen: because there was no one with me when I suffered as you are suffering, and nothing except the power of God, I could in no way gain help; you, on the contrary, my child, you can be aided by me."

"Sire!"

"And consequently," continued Henry, with affectionate sorrow, "you may hope to see an end to your troubles."

The young man shook his head as an indication of doubt.

"Du Bouchage," said Henry, "you shall be happy, or I will no longer be called King of France."

"Happy, I! Alas! sire, that is impossible," said the young man, with a smile mixed with inexpressible bitterness.

"And why so?"

"Because my happiness is not of this world."

"Henry," insisted the King, "your brother, on leaving, recommended you to me as to a friend. Since, in regard to what you must do, you consult neither the wisdom of your father, nor the science of your brother, the cardinal, I wish to be an elder brother to you. Come, trust me, tell me. I assure you, Du Bouchage, that, in everything except death, my power and my affection for you shall find a remedy."

"Sire," replied the young man, falling before the feet of the King, "sire, do not confuse me by the expression of a kindness to which I cannot answer. My unhappiness is without a remedy, for it is my unhappiness alone which makes my sole joy."

"Du Bouchage, you are a fool, and you will kill yourself with idle fancies; it is I who tell you so."

"I well know it, sire," replied the young man, calmly.

"But!" exclaimed the King in some impatience, "is it a marriage that you desire to make, is it influence that you wish to exert?"

"Sire, it is love that I must inspire. You see that every one is powerless to procure me this favor. I alone must win it, and win it by myself alone."

"Then why despair?"

"Because I feel that I shall never win it, sire."

"Try, try, my child; you are rich, you are young: what woman can resist the triple influence of beauty, love, and youth? There are none, Du Bouchage, there are none."

"How many men in my place would bless your Majesty for your excessive indulgence, for your favor with which you overwhelm me! To be beloved by such a king as your Majesty is almost as much as to be beloved of God."

"So you accept? Good! say nothing, if you want to be discreet; I will gain information, I will have steps taken. You know what I did for your brother. I will do as much for you; a hundred thousand crowns shall not stop me."

Du Bouchage seized the hand of the King and pressed it to his lips.

"May your Majesty some day demand my blood," said he, "and I will spill it to the last drop, to prove to you how grateful I am for the help I refuse!"

Henry III. turned on his heel in vexation.

"Truly," said he, "these Joyeuses are more stubborn than the Valois. Here is one who daily brings me his long face and his eyes encircled in black; how cheerful this will be! there are already too many bright faces at court!"

"Oh! sire, never mind," exclaimed the young man, "I will lay fever on my cheeks like bright rouge, and every one on seeing me smile will believe that I am the happiest of men."

"Yes, but I, I; I shall know the contrary, obstinate wretch, and this knowledge will make me sad."

"Will your Majesty permit me to retire?" demanded Du Bouchage.

"Yes, my child, go, and try to be a man."

The young man kissed the hand of the King, bowed to the queen mother, passed proudly by D'Épernon, who did not salute him, and went out.

Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when the King cried:

"Close the doors, Nambu."

At once the usher to whom this order was addressed announced in the antechamber that the King would receive no one else.

Then Henry approached the Duc d'Épernon, and touched him on the shoulder.

"La Valette," said he, "this evening you will have some money given to your Forty-Five, and you will grant them leave of absence for a day and night; I want them to enjoy themselves. By the mass! they saved me, those fellows saved me, like the white horse of Sylla."

"Saved?" said Catharine, in astonishment.

"Yes, mother."

"Saved from what?"

"Ah! that is it! ask D'Épernon."

"I ask you yourself, which is still better, it seems to me."

"Well, madame, our very dear cousin, the sister of your good friend Monsieur de Guise — Oh! do not deny it, he is your good friend."

Catharine smiled like a woman who says:

"He will never understand."

The King saw the smile, compressed his lips, and continued:

"The sister of your good friend De Guise set an ambuscade for me yesterday."

"An ambuscade?"

"Yes, madame; yesterday I just escaped being arrested, assassinated, perhaps" —

"By Monsieur de Guise?" cried Catharine.

"You do not believe it?"

"No, I confess it, I do not."

"D'Épernon, my friend, for the love of Heaven relate the adventure in full to madame the queen mother. If I were to speak and she should continue to shrug her shoulders as she is now shrugging them, I should fly into a passion, and I have no health left."

Then turning to Catharine:

"Adieu, madame, adieu; love Monsieur de Guise as much as you please; I have already had Monsieur de Salcède broken on the wheel, you remember?"

"Without doubt."

"Well! Let Messieurs de Guise do as you do, let them not forget."

This said, the King shrugged his shoulders higher than his mother had shrugged hers, and reëntered his apartment, followed by Master Love, who was forced to run in order to keep up with him.

CHAPTER LVII.

RED PLUME AND WHITE PLUME.

Having returned to the men, let us return a little to facts. It was eight o'clock in the evening and the house of Robert Briquet, solitary, sad, and without a light, stood with its triangular form outlined against a cloudy sky, which was evidently more disposed toward rain than moonlight. This sorry-looking house, the soul of which one felt had departed, was a worthy counterpart of that mysterious house to which we have already had the honor of introducing our readers, and which stood opposite. Philosophers, who pretend that nothing lives, speaks, or feels like inanimate things, would have

said on seeing the two houses that they were yawning in each other's faces.

Not far from there a great sound of brass was heard, mingled with confused voices, vague murmurs, and yelping as if some Corybantes in a cave were celebrating the mysterious rites of the kind goddess.

It was probably this noise which attracted thither a young man in a violet cap with a red plume, and a gray cloak. He was a good-looking horseman, and stood for several minutes before this hubbub, then walked slowly back, thoughtful and with bent head, toward the house of Maître Robert Briquet.

Now, this clashing symphony of brass was the noise of the saucepans; those vague murmurs that of pots boiling on braziers and spits turned by the paws of dogs; the cries those of Maître Fournichon, the host of *The Proud Chevalier*, busy with the care of his furnaces; and the screaming that of Dame Fournichon, who was making ready the boudoirs in the turrets.

When the young man of the violet cap had looked well at the fire, thoroughly inhaled the odor of fowl, and carefully investigated the curtains at the windows, he retraced his steps and then began his survey again.

But, however free his walk might seem at first glance, there was a limit which the walker never passed; this was a kind of gutter which ran across the street in front of the house of Robert Briquet, and terminated in the mysterious house.

However, it must be admitted that every time the man reached this limit he found there, like a watchful sentinel, another young man of almost the same age as himself, wearing a black cap with a white plume, and a violet cloak. This young man, with his scowling brow, fixed glance, and his hand on his sword, seemed like the giant Adamastor to say:

"You shall go no further without meeting a tempest."

The walker of the red plume, that is the first whom we introduced on the scene, had taken almost twenty turns without noticing all this, so preoccupied was he. Of course he had not failed to see a man walking like himself on the highway, but the man was too well dressed for a robber, and the idea never entered his head to be uneasy about anything, except in regard to that which was going on at *The Proud Chevalier*.

The gloomy face of the other, on the contrary, looked blacker and blacker at each return of the red plume; finally, the dose

of irritated fluid became so heavy to the white plume that it attracted the attention of the red plume.

The latter raised his head and read on the face of the one opposite him the whole of the evil wish which he seemed to feel in his glance.

This naturally led him to think that he was annoying the young man; then this thought brought the desire to find out in what respect he was annoying him.

Consequently he set himself attentively to watch the house of Robert Briquet.

From this house his eyes passed to its counterpart. Finally, when he had looked well at both, without being troubled or at least without appearing to be troubled by the way in which the young man of the white plume was watching him, he turned and went back to the shining fires of Maître Fournichon.

The white plume, happy at having routed his adversary, for he attributed the reverse movement which he had just seen him make to a rout, — the white plume began to walk in his direction, that is, from east to west, while the other went from west to east. But when each had arrived at the point which he had mentally marked for the limit of his course, he turned and came back in a straight line towards the other, and in so straight a line that had it not been for the gutter, a new Rubicon which had to be crossed, they would have run into each other, so scrupulously respected was the precision of the straight line.

The white plume twirled his small mustache with a visible movement of impatience.

The red plume assumed a surprised air, and threw another glance at the mysterious house.

Then one might have seen the white plume take a step to cross the Rubicon, but the red plume was already in the distance; the reverse line of march began anew.

For five minutes one might have thought that they would meet only at the antipodes; but before long both returned with the same instinct and the same precision as the first time.

Like two clouds which, under contrary winds, follow the same zone of the sky, and which one sees advancing towards each other and unfurling their black flakes, prudent advance guards, the two men this time came face to face with each other, resolved to walk on each other's toes rather than retreat one step.

More impatient, no doubt, than the one he had just met, the white plume, instead of standing on the edge of the gutter, as he had done until then, strode across the said gutter and made his adversary retreat. The latter had not suspected this act of aggression, and having his two hands held under his cloak, almost lost his balance.

"Ah! monsieur," said the latter, "are you mad or do you mean to insult me?"

"Monsieur, I intend to make you understand that you are greatly annoying me; it even appears to me that you perceive this, without my needing to tell you."

"Not at all, monsieur, for my theory is never to see what I do not wish to see."

"However, there are some things which would attract your attention, I trust, if they were made to shine before your eyes."

And suiting the action to his words, the young man of the white plume threw off his cape and drew his sword, which gleamed in a ray of moonlight which just then stole out from between two clouds.

The red plume stood motionless.

"One would say, monsieur," replied he, shrugging his shoulders, "that you had never taken a sword from its sheath, you are in such haste to draw it out against one who cannot defend himself."

"No, but who will defend himself, I hope."

The red plume smiled with a calmness which increased the irritation of his adversary.

"Why so? and what right have you to prevent my walking in the street?"

"Why are you walking in this street?"

"By Heaven, a fine question! because it pleases me."

"Ah! it pleases you?"

"Certainly. You walk here yourself; have you permission from the King to trample down the pavement of the street De Bussy by yourself?"

"Whether I have permission or not matters little."

"You are mistaken; it matters greatly, on the contrary. I am a faithful servant of his Majesty, and would not disobey him."

"Ah! you are joking, I suppose!"

"What if I were? You threaten, do you?"

"Heavens and earth! I tell you that you annoy me, monsieur, and that if you do not go away voluntarily, I will remove you by force."

"Oh, oh, monsieur, that remains to be seen!"

"Well! by Heaven! that is what I told you an hour ago; so!"

"Monsieur, I have particular business in this quarter. You are warned, therefore. Now, if it is an absolute desire on your part, I will gladly exchange a pass of the sword; but I will not go away."

"Monsieur," said the white plume, making his sword whistle and gathering himself up like a man preparing to put himself on guard, "I am Count Henry du Bouchage, brother to Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse; for the last time, will it please you to let me pass and to take yourself off?"

"Monsieur," replied the red plume, "I am the Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges. You do not annoy me at all, and I see no objection whatever to your staying here."

Du Bouchage reflected an instant, and then returned his sword to its sheath.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said he, "I am in love and half mad."

"I also am in love," replied Ernauton, "but I do not consider myself a fool on that account."

Henry turned pale.

"You are in love?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you admit it?"

"Since when has it been a crime?"

"But in love with some one in this street?"

"For the time being, yes."

"In Heaven's name, monsieur, tell me with whom you are in love."

"Ah! Monsieur du Bouchage, you have not reflected on what you ask of me; you well know that a gentleman cannot reveal a secret of which he knows but the half."

"That is true; pardon, Monsieur de Carmainges, but truly, no one under Heaven is as wretched as I am."

There was such genuine pain and eloquent despair in the last words uttered by the young man that Ernauton was deeply touched.

"Oh! my God! I understand," said he; "you are afraid that we shall be rivals."

"I fear so."

"Humph!" said Ernauton. "Well, monsieur, I will be frank."

Joyeuse grew pale, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"I," continued Ernauton, "have an appointment."

"You have an appointment?"

"Yes, in good form."

"In this street?"

"In this street."

"Written?"

"Yes, in a very pretty handwriting, too."

"From a woman?"

"No, a man."

"A man! What do you mean?"

"Nothing except what I say. I have an appointment with a woman, written by a man; it is not exactly so mysterious, but it is more elegant; she has a secretary, apparently."

"Ah!" murmured Henry, "finish, monsieur; in Heaven's name, finish!"

"You ask me in such a way, monsieur, that I do not know how to refuse you. I will, therefore, tell you the purport of the note."

"I am listening."

"You will see if the affair is one and the same as yours."

"Enough, monsieur, for pity's sake. No appointment has been made with me, nor have I received any note."

Ernauton drew a small sheet of paper from his purse.

"There is the note, monsieur," said he; "it would be difficult for me to read it to you this dark night; but it is short, and I know it by heart; you feel sure that I will not deceive you?"

"Oh, perfectly!"

"Here are the terms in which it is couched:

"'Monsieur Ernauton: My secretary is charged by me to say to you that I have a great desire to talk with you for an hour; your merit has touched me.'"

"That is there?" demanded Du Bouchage.

"Faith! yes, monsieur, the phrase is even underlined. I will pass by another sentence somewhat too flattering."

"And you are expected?"

"That is, I am waiting, as you see."

"Then they will open the door for you?"

"No, they are to whistle three times from the window."

Henry, trembling from head to foot, laid one of his hands on the arm of Ernauton, and with the other pointing to the mysterious house:

"From here?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied Ernauton, indicating the turrets of *The Proud Chevalier*, "from there."

Henry gave a cry of delight.

"But you are not going here, then?" said he.

"Why, no! the note says positively the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*."

"Oh! bless you, monsieur," said the young man, pressing the hand of the other. "Ah! forgive my discourtesy, my foolishness. Alas! you know that for a man who is really in love there is but one woman, and seeing you constantly return to that house, I thought that it was this woman who was expecting you."

"I have nothing to forgive, monsieur," said Ernauton, smiling, "for truly, for an instant, I myself had the idea that you were in this street for the same purpose as myself."

"And you had the incredible patience to say nothing to me, monsieur! Oh! you are not in love, you are not in love!"

"Faith, listen, I have no great reason, as yet; I was waiting for some explanation before growing angry. These great ladies have such strange fancies, and a mystery is so amusing!"

"Come, come, Monsieur de Carmainges, you are not in love, as I am, and yet"—

"And yet?" repeated Ernauton.

"And yet you are happier."

"Ah! are they cruel in that house?"

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said Joyeuse, "for three months I have been madly in love with the woman who lives there; and I have not yet had the happiness of hearing the sound of her voice."

"The devil! you are not very far advanced. But, listen!"

"What?"

"Was not that a whistle?"

"Yes, it seems to me I heard one."

The two young men listened; a second whistle came from the direction of *The Proud Chevalier*.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Ernauton, "you will excuse me for not remaining longer with you, but I think that is my signal."

A third whistle was heard.

"Go, monsieur, go," said Henry, "and good luck to you!"

Ernauton walked briskly away, and Du Bouchage saw him disappear in the darkness of the street, reappear in the light which came from the windows of *The Proud Chevalier*, and again disappear.

As to himself, he was gloomier than before, for that kind of an encounter had brought him out of his lethargy for an instant.

"Well," said he, "let us carry out our customary programme, and knock as usual on the cursed door which never opens."

And saying these words, he advanced, hesitatingly, to the door of the mysterious house.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE DOOR OPENS.

But upon reaching the door of the mysterious house poor Henry was seized with his usual hesitation.

"Courage," said he to himself, "let us knock!"

And he took another step.

But before knocking he gave a last glance behind him, and saw on the road the brilliant reflection from the lights of the inn.

"There," said he to himself, "men enter for love and joy, who are invited and who have not even desired to be. Why have I not a tranquil heart and careless smile? I too might perhaps enter there instead of vainly trying to enter here."

The clock of Saint Germain des Prés was heard striking sadly in the distance.

"Come, that is ten o'clock," murmured Henry.

He reached the threshold of the door and raised the knocker.

"A frightful life mine!" he murmured, "the life of an old man. Oh! when shall I be able to say: 'Beautiful death, smiling death, gentle tomb, greeting'?"

He knocked a second time.

"So it is," he continued, listening; "there is the sound of the inner door creaking, the groaning of the stairs, the noise of approaching footsteps; always this way, always the same."

And he knocked a third time.

"Another knock," said he, "the last. So it is; the step becomes lighter, the servant looks out from the iron trellis, he sees my pale, sinister, insufferable face, then he goes away, without ever opening the door."

The cessation of all sounds seemed to justify the prediction of the wretched young man.

"Adieu, cruel house; adieu until to-morrow," said he.

And stooping down so that his forehead was on a level with the stone threshold, he impressed thereon, from the depths of his soul, a kiss which might have made the hard granite tremble, for it was less hard than the hearts of the occupants of the house. Then he started to walk away as he had done the day before, and as he expected to do on the following day. But scarcely had he gone two steps when, to his great surprise, the bolt grated in its staple; the door opened and the servant bowed low.

He was the same man whose portrait we traced at the time of his interview with Robert Briquet.

"Good evening, monsieur," said he, in a rasping voice; but the sound seemed to Du Bouchage sweeter than the softest songs of cherubims one hears in dreams of childhood, when one still dreams of Heaven.

Trembling, distracted, Henry, who had already gone ten feet away, quickly returned, and clasping his hands, he staggered so visibly that the servant took hold of him to prevent his falling on the threshold. The man did it, moreover, with a visible expression of respectful compassion.

"Come, monsieur," said he, "here I am; tell me, I beg you, what you desire?"

"I have loved so deeply," replied the young man, "that I know not if I still love. My heart has beaten so that I cannot tell if it still beats."

"Monsieur," said the servant, respectfully, "will you kindly sit down beside me and talk?"

"Oh, yes."

The servant made him a sign with his hand.

Henry obeyed this sign as he would have obeyed a gesture of the King of France or of the Roman emperor.

"Speak, monsieur," said the servant, when they were seated beside each other, "and tell me your wish."

"My friend," replied Du Bouchage, "to-day is not the first time that we have spoken to each other and been near each other. Many times, you know, I have waited for you and surprised you at the corner of some street; I have offered you gold enough to make you rich, had you been the most avaricious of men; at other times I have tried to intimidate you; never have you listened to me, you have always seen me suffering, and apparently at least without pitying me. To-day you tell me to speak to you, you ask me to state my wish; what has happened, my God! and what new misfortune is hidden for me under this condescension on your part?"

The servant heaved a sigh. Evidently beneath his rough exterior he had a sympathetic heart.

The sigh was heard by Henry, and it encouraged him.

"You know," he continued, "that I love, and how I love; you have seen me follow a woman and find her, in spite of her efforts to hide and run from me; never in my deepest griefs has a bitter word escaped me; never have I given way to those thoughts of violence which are born of despair and of the counsels which fiery youth breathes into us with the heat of the blood."

"That is true, monsieur," said the servant, "and in this full justice is done you by my mistress and myself."

"But, you will admit," continued Henry, pressing the hands of the vigilant guardian between his own; "you will admit, will you not, that any evening, when you refused me entrance to this house, I could have broken in the door, as is done daily by the most insignificant student, drunk or in love? And in this way, had it been but for a moment, I could have seen this inexorable woman, and could have spoken with her."

"That is true also."

"Finally," continued the young count, with inexpressible sweetness and sadness, "I am something in this world, my name is great, my fortune is large, my credit assured, the King himself, the King, protects me; only a short time ago his Majesty advised me to confide my grief to him, told me to have recourse to him, and offered me his help."

"Ah!" said the servant, in evident anxiety.

"I did not wish it," the young man hastened to say; "no, no, I refused everything, everything, in order to come and beg

you with clasped hands to open this door which I well know is never opened."

"Monsieur le Comte, you have a loyal heart indeed, and are worthy of being loved."

"Well!" interrupted Henry, with a sad contraction of the heart, "this man of the loyal heart, and who, in your opinion, is worthy of being loved, to what do you condemn him? Every morning my page brings a letter. It is not even received; every evening I come myself to knock at this door, and every evening I am refused; in fact, you let me suffer, despair, die in the street, without having for me the pity you would feel for a poor howling dog. Ah! my friend, I tell you this woman has not the heart of a woman. An unfortunate wretch is not loved, so be it. Ah! my God! we can no more command our hearts to love than to tell them not to love; but we have pity for an unhappy man who suffers, and we give him a word of consolation; we are sorry for a wretched man who falls, and we hold out our hand to help him rise; but, no, no, this woman delights in my punishment; this woman has no heart; no, for had she had a heart, she would have killed me with a refusal from her lips or would have had me killed with the blow of a knife, with the thrust of a dagger; dead, I would at least no longer suffer."

"Monsieur le Comte," replied the servant, after having patiently listened to every word the young man had uttered, "the lady you accuse, believe me, is far from having a heart as cold, and above all, as cruel, as you say; she suffers more than you, and she feels for you a sincere sympathy."

"Oh! pity! pity!" cried the young man, wiping away the cold perspiration which ran down his temples, "oh! may the day come when her heart, which you praise, shall know love, love such as I feel; and if, in exchange for this love she has pity offered her, I shall be well avenged."

"Monsieur le Comte, Monsieur le Comte, not to have responded to love is no reason for not having loved; this woman has perhaps experienced a stronger passion than you will ever know; this woman has perhaps loved as you will never love."

Henry raised his hands to Heaven.

"When one loves in this way one loves forever," he cried.

"Have I told you that she no longer loves, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the servant.

Henry gave a cry of pain and sank down as though he had been struck by death.

"She loves?" he exclaimed; "she loves! Ah! my God! my God!"

"Yes, she loves; but you need not be jealous of the man she loves, Monsieur le Comte; this man is no longer of this world. My mistress is a widow," added the sympathetic servant, hoping by these words to calm the young man's grief.

And, in fact, as by magic, the words brought back breath, life, and hope.

"Well, in the name of Heaven," said he, "do not abandon me! She is a widow, you say; then she must have been so but a short time, and she will exhaust the source of her tears. She is a widow — ah! my friend, in that case she loves no one, since she loves a corpse, a shadow, a name. Death is less than absence; to tell me that she loves a dead man is to tell me that she will love. Ah! my God! every great grief grows calm with time. When the widow of Mausole, who had vowed eternal grief at the tomb of her husband, when the widow of Mausole had exhausted her tears, she was cured. Regret is a malady; whoever is not carried away in a crisis comes out from the crisis more vigorous and more vivacious than before."

The servant shook his head.

"This lady, Monsieur le Comte," he replied, "like the wife of King Mausole, vowed eternal fidelity to the dead; I know her, and she will keep her word better than the forgotten woman of whom you tell me kept hers."

"I will wait, I will wait ten years, if necessary!" cried Henry; "God will not allow her to die of grief, or to cut short her days violently; you readily see that since she is not dead, she can live, and that since she lives, I may hope."

"Oh! young man, young man," said the servant in a mournful tone, "do not count thus on the sad thoughts of the living, on the demands of the dead. She has lived, you say? yes, she has lived! not one day, not one month, not one year; she has lived seven years!"

Joyeuse gave a start.

"But do you know why, for what object, to accomplish what resolution, she has lived? She will be consoled, you hope? Never, Monsieur le Comte, never! It is I who tell you this, I who swear it to you, I who was but the very humble servant of the dead, I who as long as he lived was a pious,

ardent soul, full of hope, and who since his death have become hard of heart; well! I, I, who am only her servant, I repeat it, I shall never grow reconciled to it."

"This man who is so deeply regretted," interrupted Henry, "this fortunate dead man, this husband" —

"He was not her husband, he was her lover, Monsieur le Comte, and a women like the one whom, unfortunately, you love has but one love throughout her whole lifetime."

"My friend, my friend!" cried the young man, frightened at the savage majesty of the high-minded man, who was lost, however, under ordinary clothes, — "my friend, I beseech you, intercede for me!"

"I!" he exclaimed, "I! listen. Monsieur le Comte, had I thought you capable of using violence towards my mistress, I should have killed you with this hand," and he drew from under his cloak a nervous, sinewy arm which seemed that of a man of scarcely twenty-five years of age, though his white locks and bent figure gave him the appearance of a man of sixty.

"If," he continued, "on the contrary, I had dreamed that my mistress could love you, it is she who would have been killed. Now, Monsieur le Comte, I have said what I have had to say, do not try to make me tell more; for on my honor, — and although I am not a gentleman, believe me, my honor is worth something, — for on my honor, I have said all that I can."

Henry rose, sick at heart.

"I thank you," said he, "for having had this consideration for my grief; now I have come to a decision."

"So you will be more calm in future, Monsieur le Comte; you will go away from us, and leave us to a fate worse than yours, believe me."

"Yes, I will indeed go away from you, rest assured," said the young man, "and forever."

"You wish to die? I understand you."

"Why should I hide it from you? I cannot live without her; I must die the moment I cannot possess her."

"Monsieur le Comte, I have very often spoken of death with my mistress. Believe me, it is a bad death that one brings about by one's own hand."

"Therefore it is not that one which I shall choose; for a young man of my name, age, and fortune there is a death which always has been a beautiful death, that which comes to one in defending one's king and country."

"If you suffer beyond your strength, if you owe nothing to those who will outlive you, if death on the field of battle is open to you, die, Monsieur le Comte, die; I myself should have been dead long ago had I not been condemned to live."

"Farewell, and thanks," replied Joyeuse, holding out his hand to the unknown servant.

And he went rapidly away, throwing a heavy purse of gold at the feet of the man, who was touched by his deep grief.

Midnight struck from the church of Saint Germain des Prés.

CHAPTER LIX.

HOW A GREAT LADY LOVED IN THE YEAR OF GRACE 1586.

The three whistles which had been given at equal intervals were those which were to serve as a signal to the fortunate Ernauton.

When the young man reached the house, he found Dame Fournichon at the door, where she was waiting for patrons with a smile which made her resemble a mythological goddess interpreted by a Flemish painter.

Dame Fournichon still held in her large white hands a gold crown, which, on passing, another hand just as white but more delicate than hers had placed there.

She looked at Ernauton and, placing her hands on her lips, filled the capacity of the doorway so as to render all passing impossible.

Ernauton, on his side, stopped like a man asking to enter.

"What do you want, monsieur?" said she; "and whom do you want?"

"Were not three whistles given just now from the window of this tower, my good woman?"

"Yes."

"Well! I am the one the three whistles called."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Then it is different, if you give me your word of honor."

"The honor of a gentleman, my dear Madame Fournichon."

"In that case, I will believe you; enter, handsome cavalier, enter."

And happy at finally having one of the patrons she had so ardently desired for the unfortunate *Rose-tree of Love*, which had been dethroned by *The Proud Chevalier*, the hostess had Ernauton mount the winding staircase which led to the most ornamented and the most discreet of her towers. A small door, rather vulgarly painted, gave access to a sort of antechamber, and from this antechamber one came to the tower itself. This was furnished, decorated, and carpeted with somewhat more luxury than one would have expected in this remote corner of Paris; but, it must be admitted, Dame Fournichon had used taste in the embellishment of the tower, her favorite room, and one usually succeeds in what one does for love.

Madame Fournichon therefore had succeeded as much as it is possible for a rather ordinary mind to succeed in such things. When the young man entered the antechamber he smelled a strong odor of benzoin and aloes; it was a holocaust carried on, no doubt, by the somewhat too susceptible person who, while waiting for Ernauton, was trying to fight, with the aid of vegetable perfumes, the culinary vapors exhaled from the spit and the saucepans.

Dame Fournichon followed the young man step by step. She pushed him from the stairway into the antechamber, and from the antechamber into the tower, her eyes made small by Anacreontic twinkling; then she withdrew.

Ernauton stood with his right hand on the portière, his left hand on the latch of the door, half bending from his salutation.

He perceived in the voluptuous half-light of the tower, brightened by a single wax taper, the elegant figure of a woman, such as always commands, if not love, at least attention, if indeed it be not desire.

Reclining among cushions, completely enveloped in silk and velvet, this woman, whose tiny foot hung from the end of the couch, was occupied in burning in the candle the remains of a small branch of aloes, toward which she occasionally leaned, in order to inhale it, the smoke blowing into her face, thus filling with its vapor the folds of her hood and her hair, as though she wished to be thoroughly permeated with the intoxicating smoke.

Now, from the way in which she threw the remainder of the branch into the fire, and dropped her skirt over her foot and

hid her masked face, Ernauton perceived that she had heard him enter and knew he was near her.

However, she did not turn.

Ernauton waited a moment; she did not move.

"Madame," said the young man, in a voice which he strove to render gentle by force of gratitude, "madame, you have sent for your humble servant; here he is."

"Ah! very good," said the lady, "be seated, I beg you, Monsieur Ernauton."

"Pardon me, madame, but before everything else I ought to thank you for the honor you do me."

"Ah! that is courteous, and you are right, Monsieur de Carmainges, and yet you do not know whom you are thanking, I presume."

"Madame," said the young man, approaching by degrees, "you have hidden your face behind a mask, your hand is concealed by gloves; just as I entered you robbed me of the sight of a foot, which certainly would have made me mad about your whole person; I see nothing which allows me to recognize you; therefore I can only guess."

"And you guess who I am?"

"She whom my heart desires, she whom my imagination paints as young, beautiful, and rich, too rich and even too powerful for me to think that what is happening to me is indeed real, and that I am not now dreaming."

"Did you have much trouble in entering?" asked the lady, without replying directly to the flood of words which escaped from the overflowing heart of Ernauton.

"No, madame, I had less trouble in gaining admission than I should have supposed."

"For a man, everything is easy, it is true; but it is not so for a woman."

"I greatly regret, madame, all the trouble which you have taken, and for which I can only offer you my very humble thanks."

But the lady already appeared to have passed on to another thought.

"What were you saying to me, monsieur?" said she, carelessly removing her glove to show a hand at once adorably plump and slender.

"I was saying to you, madame, that without having seen

your features, I know who you are, and that without fear of being mistaken, I can tell you that I love you."

"Do you think you can answer for it that I am indeed the one you expected to find here?"

"In default of seeing, my heart says so."

"You know me, then?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Truly, for a native of the provinces, who has scarcely arrived, you already know the women of Paris!"

"Among all the women of Paris, madame, I know as yet only one."

"And that one is myself?"

"I think so."

"And how do you recognize me?"

"By your voice, your grace, and your beauty."

"By my voice, I understand that, for I cannot disguise it; by my grace, I can accept the word as a compliment; but by my beauty, I cannot admit the answer except by hypothesis."

"How so, madame?"

"You say you recognize me by my beauty, and my beauty is veiled."

"It was less so, madame, the day when, in order to aid you in entering Paris, I held you so close to me that your breast touched my shoulder, and your breath burned my cheek."

"So, upon the receipt of my letter, you guessed that it was from me?"

"Oh! no, no, madame, do not suppose so. Not for a single instant did I have such an idea. I thought that I was the butt of some joke, the victim of some mistake; I thought that I was threatened by one of those catastrophes called good luck; and it is only a few minutes ago, on seeing you, on touching you"—

And Ernauton attempted to take a hand which was withdrawn from his.

"Enough," said the lady; "the fact is I have committed a great piece of folly."

"In what respect, madame, I pray you?"

"In what respect! you say that you know me, and you ask me in what respect I have acted foolishly."

"Oh! that is true, madame, and I am very insignificant, very obscure beside your highness."

"Now, for Heaven's sake do me the kindness to hush, monsieur! Have you no sense?"

"What have I done, madame, in Heaven's name?" asked Ernauton, frightened.

"What! you see me masked" —

"Well?"

"If I wear a mask, it is probably with the idea of disguising myself, and you address me as 'highness!' Why do you not open the window and shout out my name in the street?"

"Oh! forgive me, forgive me," said Ernauton, falling on his knees, "I relied on the discretion of these walls."

"It seems to me that you are credulous?"

"Alas, madame, I am in love!"

"And you are convinced that I shall at once respond to this love by a similar love?"

Ernauton arose, thoroughly piqued.

"No, madame," he replied.

"What do you think, then?"

"I think that you have something important to say to me, that you did not wish to receive me at the Hôtel de Guise, or in your house at Bel Esbat, and that you preferred a secret conversation in a remote place."

"You thought that?"

"Yes."

"And what do you think that I have to say to you? Come, speak; I should not be angry at appreciating your perspicacity."

And the lady, under her apparent indifference, in spite of herself, showed a certain anxiety.

"Why, how do I know?" replied Ernauton. "Something concerning Monsieur de Mayenne, perhaps."

"Have I not my couriers, monsieur, who to-morrow evening will have told me more about him than you can tell me, since you have told me all that you know?"

"Possibly some question to ask me concerning the event of last night?"

"Ah! what event, and of what are you speaking?" asked the lady, whose bosom heaved perceptibly.

"Of the panic experienced by Monsieur d'Épernon, of the arrest of the Lorraine gentlemen."

"Some Lorraine gentlemen were arrested?"

"Twenty of them, who were found at the wrong time on the road to Vincennes."

"Which is also the road to Soissons, the town in which

Monsieur de Guise keeps his garrison, I believe. Ah! yes, Monsieur Ernauton, you are at court, and can tell me why these gentlemen were arrested."

"I at court?"

"Without doubt."

"You know that, madame?"

"Well! in order to have your address I had to gain information. But finish your sentences, for the love of God! You have a deplorable habit of turning the conversation; what has been the result of this blundering affair?"

"Absolutely nothing, madame; at least, so far as I know."

"Then why did you think that I would speak of something which has had no result?'

"I am wrong this time as before, madame, and I acknowledge my mistake."

"What, monsieur! now from what country do you come?"

"From Agen."

"What, monsieur, you are a Gascon! for Agen is in Gascony, I believe."

"Practically."

"You are a Gascon, and you are not vain enough to suppose that merely because I saw you the day of the execution of Salcède, at the Porte Saint Antoine, I thought you good looking?"

Ernauton blushed and grew disconcerted. The lady continued imperturbably:

"That I met you in the street, and I found you handsome?"

Ernauton became scarlet.

"That finally, as bearer of a message from my brother Mayenne, you came to my house, and that I found you greatly to my liking?"

"Madame, madame, I do not think all this, God forgive me."

"Then you were wrong," replied the lady, turning towards Ernauton for the first time, and fixing on his eyes two flaming eyes of her own from behind the mask, while beneath the panting gaze of the young man she displayed the charm of a bent figure, outlined in rounded and voluptuous curves against the velvet of the cushions.

Ernauton clasped his hands.

"Madame! madame!" he exclaimed, "are you making fur of me?"

"Faith no!" said she in the same easy tone; "I say that you pleased me, and it is the truth."

"My God!"

"And you yourself, did you not dare to tell me that you loved me?"

"But when I declared that I did not know who you were, madame, and now that I do know, oh! I very humbly beg your pardon."

"Well, now he is losing his reason," murmured the lady, with impatience. "But remain what you are, monsieur, and say what you think, or you will make me regret my having come."

Ernauton fell on his knees.

"Speak, madame," said he, "speak, that I may be convinced this is not a play, and perhaps I may dare to answer you."

"So be it. This is my plan concerning you," said the lady, pushing Ernauton away, as she carefully arranged the folds of her gown. "I have a liking for you, but I do not yet know you. I am not accustomed to resist my fancies, but I am not foolish enough to make mistakes. Had we been equal I should have received you at my house, and should have studied you at my ease before you had even suspected my intentions regarding you; but that was impossible; it was necessary to arrange otherwise and hasten the meeting. Now you know what you may expect from me. Become worthy of me; this is all that I can recommend to you."

Ernauton exhausted himself in protestations.

"Oh! less warmth, Monsieur de Carmainges, I beg you," said the lady, carelessly; "it is not worth while. Perhaps it was merely your name which struck me the first time we met, and which pleased me. After all, I really think that I have only a fancy for you and that it will pass. However, do not think yourself too far from perfection and begin to despair. I cannot endure perfect people. Oh! I adore devoted men, for instance. Remember this, I will allow you to do so, handsome cavalier."

Ernauton was beside himself. The haughty language, the gestures full of voluptuous grace, the proud superiority, the easy manner towards him, from so illustrious a person, plunged him at once into the most exquisite delight and terror.

He seated himself beside his beautiful and proud mistress, who let him do so; then he attempted to put his arm behind the cushions which supported her.

"Monsieur," said she, "it seems that you heard me, but that you did not understand me. No familiarity, I beg; let us each keep his place. It is certain that some day I will give you the right of calling me yours, but as yet you have not this right."

Ernauton arose, pale and vexed.

"Excuse me, madame," said he. "It seems that I act very foolishly; but this is very simple to understand. I am not yet acquainted with the customs of Paris. With us, in the provinces, two hundred leagues from here, when a woman says 'I love,' she loves and does not refuse herself. She does not make her words a pretext for humiliating a man at her feet. It is your custom as a Parisian, it is your right as a princess. I accept all that. But what can you expect? I am ignorant of the customs, but they will come to me."

The lady listened in silence. It was evident that she continued to observe Ernauton attentively, in order to discover if his vexation would end in real anger.

"Ah! ah! You are angry, I think," said she, proudly.

"Yes, I am angry, madame, but at myself, because I have for you, madame, not a passing fancy, but love, very sincere and very pure love. I do not seek your person, for if it were so, I should desire you, that is all; but I am trying to win your heart. Therefore I shall never forgive myself, madame, for having by my impertinence compromised the respect I owe you, a respect I will change to love, madame, only when you command me to do so. Only be glad, madame, that from this moment I await your orders."

"Come, come," said the lady, "let us not exaggerate things, Monsieur de Carmainges; here you are positively frozen after having been completely on fire."

"But it seems to me, madame" —

"Well, monsieur, never say to a woman that you will love her as you wish — that is tactless; show her that you will love her as she wishes, in good time!"

"That is what I said, madame."

"Yes, but you do not think it."

"I bow before your superiority, madame."

"A truce to politeness, it is repugnant to me to play the queen here. See, here is my hand, take it; it is that of a simple woman, only it is more feverish and more animated than yours."

Ernauton took the beautiful hand respectfully.

"Well!" said the duchess.

"Well?"

"You do not kiss it! are you mad? and have you sworn to put me in a rage?"

"But a moment ago" —

"A moment ago I snatched it from you, while now" —

"Now?"

"Well! now I give it to you."

Ernauton kissed the hand so obediently that she at once withdrew it.

"You readily see," said the young man, "another lesson!"

"I was wrong, then?"

"Surely, you make me go from one extreme to the other; fear will end by killing my passion; I shall continue to adore you, on my knees, it is true, but I shall have for you neither love nor confidence."

"Oh! I do not want that," said the lady in a playful tone, "for you would be a sorry lover, and I do not like my lovers to be so, I warn you. No, be natural, remain yourself, be Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges, and nothing else. I have my caprices. Well! my God! did you not tell me that I was beautiful? Every beautiful woman has her whims; respect them a great deal; oppose some of them; above all, do not fear me; and when I say to the too fiery Ernauton, 'Calm yourself,' let him consult my eyes, never my voice."

At these words she rose. It was time; the young man, carried away by his delirium, had seized her in his arms, and the mask of the duchess had brushed an instant against Ernauton's lips. It was then that she proved the deep truth of what she had said, for through the mask her eyes shot a glance as cold and white as the sinister forerunner of storms.

This glance so affected Carmainges that he dropped his arms and all his ardor died away.

"Well," said the duchess, "that is good, we shall see each other again. Really, you please me, Monsieur de Carmainges."

Ernauton bowed.

"When are you free?" she asked carelessly.

"Alas! Very seldom, madame," replied Ernauton.

"Ah! yes. I understand the service is fatiguing, is it not?"

"What service?"

"Why, the one you perform near the King. Do you not belong to the bodyguard of his Majesty?"

"That is to say, madame, I am one of a company of gentlemen."

"That is what I mean; and these gentlemen are Gascons, I believe?"

"Yes, all of us, madame."

"How many are there of you? I have been told, but I forget."

"Forty-five."

"What a singular number!"

"Nevertheless, so it is."

"Was it so arranged on purpose?"

"I think not; chance must be reponsible for the number."

"And these forty-five gentlemen do not leave the King, you say?"

"I did not say that we never left his Majesty, madame."

"Ah! pardon me, I thought I heard you say so. At least you said that you had but little liberty."

"That is true, I have but little liberty, madame, because during the day we are on duty to go out riding or hunting with his Majesty, and at night we are consigned to the Louvre."

"At night?"

"Yes."

"Every night?"

"Almost every night."

"In that case see what might have happened this evening if, for instance, this order had detained you! I would have waited for you, ignorant of the reason which prevented your coming, and should have supposed that my advances were scorned."

"Ah! madame, in order to see you I will now risk everything, I swear."

"That is useless and absurd, and I do not wish it."

"But what then?"

"Do your duty. It is for me to accommodate myself to it, for I am always free and mistress of my life."

"Oh! what kindness, madame!"

"But all this," continued the duchess, with her insinuating smile, "does not explain how you were free to-night, and how you managed to come."

"This evening, madame, I had already thought of asking permission of our captain, Monsieur de Loignac, who is well disposed towards me, when an order arrived to give the whole night to the Forty-Five."

"Ah! this order arrived?"

"Yes."

"And what was the cause of this good luck?"

"It is a reward, I believe, madame, for a rather tiresome service which we performed yesterday at Vincennes."

"Ah! very good," said the duchess.

"So, madame, it is to this circumstance that I owe the happiness of seeing you to-night, wholly at my ease."

"Well, listen, Carmainges," said the duchess, with a sweet familiarity which filled the heart of the young man with joy, "this is what you are to do: every time you think you are free, inform the hostess of this inn by note; every day a man will pass between her and me."

"Oh! my God! But it is too much kindness, madame."

The duchess laid her hand on Ernauton's arm.

"Listen," said she.

"What is it, madame?"

"That noise, whence does it come?"

In fact, the clanking of spurs, the sound of voices, the slamming of doors, and exclamations of joy rose from the room below, like the forerunner of an invasion.

Ernauton put his head outside the door that led to the antechamber.

"They are my companions," said he, "coming here to celebrate the holiday which Monsieur de Loignac has given them."

"But by what chance are they coming here to this inn in which we are?"

"Because it is precisely at *The Proud Chevalier*, madame, that the meeting was held on our arrival; because on that happy day of their entrance into the capital my companions grew fond of the wine and the pastry of Maître Fournichon, and some even of madame's towers."

"Oh!" said the duchess, with a malicious smile, "you speak very knowingly of these towers, monsieur."

"This is the first time, on my honor, that I have entered one of them, madame. But you, you who chose them?" he ventured to ask.

"You can easily understand why I chose the most lonely

place in Paris, a spot by the river, near the great wall, a place in which no one could recognize me or suspect I would come; but, my God! how noisy your companions are!" added the duchess.

In fact, the hubbub of the arrival had become an infernal hurricane; the noise of the exploits of the night before, bragging, the jingling of gold crowns and the clinking of glasses, foretold that the storm was in full blast.

Suddenly the sound of steps was heard on the small stairway which led to the tower, and the voice of Dame Fournichon cried from below:

"Monsieur de Sainte Maline! Monsieur de Sainte Maline!"

"Well?" replied the voice of the young man.

"Do not go up there, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, I beg you."

"Good! and why not, dear Dame Fournichon? Is not the whole house ours this evening?"

"The whole house, yes, but not the towers."

"Bah! The towers are a part of the house," cried five or six other voices, among which Ernauton recognized those of Perducas de Pincornay and Eustache de Miradoux.

"No, they are not," continued Dame Fournichon, "the towers are an exception, the towers belong to me; do not disturb my patrons."

"Madame Fournichon," said Sainte Maline, "I am your patron also, do not disturb me, then."

"Sainte Maline!" murmured Ernauton, anxiously, for he knew the evil tendencies and the audacity of the man.

"But, for pity's sake!" repeated Madame Fournichon.

"Madame Fournichon," said Sainte Maline, "it is midnight; at nine o'clock all the lights should be extinguished, but I see a light in your tower; only bad servants of the King transgress the edicts of the King; I wish to know who these bad servants are."

And Sainte Maline continued to advance, followed by several Gascons, whose footsteps clamped after his.

"My God!" cried the duchess, "my God, Monsieur de Carmainges, would those men dare to enter here?"

"In any case, madame, if they dare, I am here, and I can say to you in advance, madame, you need have no fear."

"Oh! but they are breaking down the doors, monsieur."

In fact, Sainte Maline, already too far advanced to retreat,

knocked so violently on the door that it broke in two; it was made of a kind of fir that Madame Fournichon had not thought necessary to test, in that her respect for love went as far as fanaticism.

CHAPTER LX.

HOW SAINTE MALINE ENTERED THE TOWER, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

ERNAUTON'S first thought, when he saw the door of the antechamber broken in two by the blows of Sainte Maline, was to blow out the candle which lighted the tower.

However, this precaution, which was good though temporary, did not reassure the duchess, when suddenly Dame Fournichon, who had exhausted all her resources, resorted to a final means, and cried out:

"Monsieur de Sainte Maline, I warn you that the persons you are disturbing are your friends; necessity forces me to tell you this."

"Well! so much the more reason for us to present our compliments to them," said Perducas de Pincornay, in a thick voice, staggering behind Sainte Maline on the last step of the staircase.

"And who are these friends, let us see?" said Sainte Maline.

"Yes, let us see them, let us see them," cried Eustache de Miradoux.

The kind hostess, still hoping to prevent a meeting which, although honoring *The Proud Chevalier*, would do the greatest harm to the *Rose-tree of Love*, ascended to the crowded ranks of the gentlemen, and whispered the name of Ernauton into the ear of his aggressor.

"Ernauton!" repeated Sainte Maline, aloud, to whom this revelation was as oil on the fire instead of water, "Ernauton! it is not possible."

"And why not?" demanded Madame Fournichon. *

"Yes, why not?" repeated several voices.

"Well, by Heaven!" cried Sainte Maline, "because Ernauton is a model of chastity, an example of continence, a compound of all the virtues. No, no, you are mistaken, Dame

Fournichon, it is not Monsieur de Carmainges who is locked in there."

And he approached the second door, in order to treat it as he had treated the first, when suddenly the door opened and Ernauton appeared on the threshold with a face which did not announce that patience was one of the virtues which, according to the words of Sainte Maline, he practised so religiously.

"By what right has Monsieur de Sainte Maline broken down the first door?" he demanded; "and having already broken down that, does he wish to demolish this too?"

"Well! It is really he, it is Ernauton!" cried Sainte Maline; "I recognize his voice, but as to himself, the devil take me if I could tell in the darkness what color he is."

"You do not reply to my question, monsieur," repeated Ernauton.

Sainte Maline laughed noisily, which reassured those of the Forty-Five who, with voices heavy with the threats they had just heard, had felt that it was prudent, at all hazards, to descend a few steps of the stairs.

"I am speaking to you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline do you hear me?" cried Ernauton.

"Yes, monsieur, perfectly," replied Sainte Maline.

"Well, what have you to say?"

"I have to say, my dear fellow, that we wanted to find out if it was you who occupied this inn of love."

"Well! now, monsieur, as you are able to satisfy yourself that it is I, since I am speaking to you, and since, if need be, I could touch you, leave me in peace."

"*Cap de Dieu!*" exclaimed Sainte Maline, "you are not a hermit, and you are not here alone, I suppose?"

"As to that, monsieur, you will allow me to leave you in doubt, supposing that you are in doubt."

"Ah, bah!" continued Sainte Maline, endeavoring to enter the tower, "could you really be alone? Ah! you are without light; bravo!"

"Come, gentlemen," said Ernauton, in a haughty tone, "I admit that you are drunk, and I forgive you; but there is a limit even to patience which we owe men who lack good sense; your jokes are exhausted, are they not? Do me the kindness, therefore, to retire."

Unfortunately Sainte Maline was in one of his moods of envious maliciousness.

"Oh, oh, retire!" said he; "how you say that, Monsieur Ernauton!"

"I said that in such a way that you could not be deceived as to my wish, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, and if necessary I will repeat it: retire, gentlemen, I beg you."

"Oh! not before you have allowed us the honor of saluting the lady for whom you have deserted our company."

At this insistence of Sainte Maline, the circle, which had been ready to break again, formed around him.

"Monsieur de Montcrabeau," said Sainte Maline, with authority, "go down and bring back a candle!"

"Monsieur de Montcrabeau," cried Ernauton, "if you do that, remember that you will offend me personally."

Montcrabeau hesitated, such a threat was in the young man's voice.

"Good!" replied Sainte Maline, "we have our oath, and Monsieur de Carmainges is so conscientious in discipline that he will not want to break it; we cannot draw swords against one another, so light up, Montcrabeau, light up."

Montcrabeau descended, and five minutes later came back with a candle which he handed to Sainte Maline.

"No, no," said the latter, "keep it; I shall perhaps need both my hands."

And Sainte Maline took a step forward to enter the tower.

"I call you to witness, all you who are here," said Ernauton, "that I am rudely insulted, and that violence is done me without cause, and that in consequence" (Ernauton quickly drew his sword) "and that in consequence I shall drive this sword into the breast of the first one who takes a step forward."

Sainte Maline, furious, also wished to seize his sword, but he had not drawn it half way from its sheath before he saw the sword of Ernauton shining at his breast.

Now, as he stepped forward, Sainte Maline felt the cold steel and sprang back in fury like a wounded bull, without Monsieur de Carmainges having had need to lunge or raise his arm. Then Ernauton went forward a step equal to the retreating one taken by Sainte Maline, and the sword hung threatening over the breast of the latter.

Sainte Maline turned pale; had Ernauton made a lunge, he would have nailed him to the wall.

He slowly returned his sword to his sheath.

"You deserve a thousand deaths for your insolence, mon-

sieur," said Ernauton, "but the oath you spoke of just now binds me, and I will not touch you further; leave me a free passage."

He stepped back to see if they would obey him.

And with a last gesture, which would have done honor to a king:

"You are at liberty, gentlemen," said he; "come, madame, I will answer for all."

Then they saw a woman appear on the threshold of the door, her head covered with a hood, her face hidden behind a veil, and who took Ernauton's arm, trembling from head to feet.

The young man replaced his sword in its sheath, and as though sure of having nothing further to fear, he proudly crossed the antechamber through the midst of his restless and curious companions.

Sainte Maline, whose breast had been grazed by the steel, had sprung back as far as the head of the stairs, choking from the merited affront which he had just received before his companions and the unknown lady.

He understood that every one would unite against him, jesters as well as serious-minded men, if affairs remained as they were between Ernauton and himself; this conviction drove him to resort to a last extremity.

He drew his dagger just as Carmainges passed in front of him.

Did he intend to kill Carmainges or did he merely intend to do what he did? It was impossible to know, without understanding the shadowy thoughts of the man, which perhaps in his fits of anger he himself could not read.

However, his arm fell upon the couple, and the blade of his dagger, instead of touching Ernauton's breast, cut the silk hood of the duchess, and snapped one of the strings of her mask. The latter fell to the floor.

Sainte Maline's movement had been so quick that in the darkness no one had been able to account for it and no one could prevent it.

The duchess gave a scream. Her mask fell from her, and along her neck she felt the rounded back of the blade, which, however, did not wound her.

While Ernauton was uneasy at the anxiety of the duchess, Sainte Maline had plenty of time to pick up the mask and return it to her, so that from the light of Montcrabeau's

candle he was able to see the uncovered face of the young woman.

"Ah! ah!" said he, in his jeering, insolent tone, "it is the beautiful lady of the litter; my congratulations, Ernauton, you go to work quickly."

Ernauton stopped and had already half drawn his sword from its sheath, which he was repenting of having put back, when the duchess pulled him down the steps, saying in a low tone:

"Come, come, I beg you, Monsieur de Carmainges."

"I will see you again, Monsieur de Sainte Maline," said Ernauton, moving off, "and rest assured, you shall pay me for this cowardly act as well as for the others."

"Good! good!" said Sainte Maline, "keep your own account, I will keep mine; some day we will settle both."

Carmainges heard, but did not even turn back; he was entirely taken up with the duchess. Arrived at the foot of the stairs, his passage was no longer obstructed; those of the Forty-Five who had not gone upstairs were below, no doubt blaming their companions for their violence. Ernauton led the duchess to her litter, which was guarded by two servants.

Having reached that, and feeling herself safe, the duchess pressed the hand of Carmainges and said to him:

"Monsieur Ernauton, after what has taken place, after the insult from which, in spite of your bravery, you could not save me, and which will not fail to be renewed, we cannot return here; look about, I beg you, for some house in the vicinity which is for sale or to let; and rest assured, before long you will hear from me."

"Must I take leave of you, madame?" said Ernauton, bowing in obedience to the orders which had just been given him, and which were too flattering to his pride for him to discuss them.

"Not yet, Monsieur de Carmainges, not yet; follow my litter to the new bridge, so that the wretch who recognized me as the lady of the litter, but who does not really know who I am, may not follow us and discover my house."

Ernauton obeyed, but no one watched them.

Having reached the Pont Neuf, which at that time deserved this name, since it was scarcely seven years since the architect Ducerceau had thrown it across the Seine,— having reached the Pont Neuf, the duchess raised her hand to Ernauton's lips, saying:

"Go now, monsieur."

"May I venture to ask when I shall see you again, madame?"

"That depends upon your haste in carrying out my commission, and this haste will prove to me how great or how small is your desire to see me again."

"Oh, madame, in that case, you may depend on me."

"That is well. Go now, my cavalier."

And the duchess a second time gave her hand to Ernauton, who kissed it and departed.

"It is strange, truly," said the young man as he retraced his steps, "this woman has a liking for me, I am sure, yet she is not in the least concerned whether or not I am killed by that assassin of a Sainte Maline."

And a slight shrug of the shoulders proved that the young man gave this indifference its proper value.

Then returning to the first thought, which contained nothing flattering to his pride:

"Oh!" he continued, "the fact is she was greatly troubled, poor woman, for the fear of being compromised is with princesses especially the strongest of all thoughts. Because," he added, smiling to himself, "she is a princess."

And as this last thought was most flattering to him, it was this that absorbed him.

But this knowledge could not make Carmainges lose the remembrance of the insult which had been given him; therefore he returned straight to the inn, so that no one might suppose that he was afraid of the possible consequences of the affair.

He naturally determined to infringe all orders and break all possible oaths, and to finish with Sainte Maline at the first word he spoke or the first gesture he allowed himself to make.

Love and pride, wounded by the same blow, roused an intrepid fury, which in his present state of exaltation would surely have made him fight ten men.

This resolution shone in his eyes when he reached the threshold of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Madame Fournichon, who was anxiously awaiting his return, stood trembling on the threshold.

At sight of Ernauton she wiped her eyes as though she had been crying a great deal, and throwing her arms around the young man's neck she begged his pardon in spite of all the

efforts of her husband, who claimed that not being in the wrong his wife had no pardon to ask.

The good hostess was not disagreeable enough for Carmainges, even had he complained of her, to continue vexed with her; he therefore assured Dame Fournichon that he felt not the slightest anger towards her, and that her wine alone was to blame.

This was an idea which the husband could comprehend, and for which he thanked Ernauton by a nod of the head.

While these things were taking place at the door every one was at table warmly discussing the event which, beyond dispute, was the culminating point of the evening.

Many blamed Sainte Maline, with the frankness which is the chief characteristic of Gascons when talking among themselves.

Several, seeing the frowning brow of their companion and his lip contracted by deep thought, abstained from expressing an opinion.

For the rest, they attacked the supper of Maître Fournichon with no less enthusiasm, but they philosophized while they attacked it, that was all.

"As to me," said Monsieur Hector de Brian, aloud, "I know that Monsieur de Sainte Maline is in the wrong, and that if for an instant my name had been Ernauton de Carmainges, Monsieur de Sainte Maline would now be lying under this table instead of sitting before it."

Sainte Maline raised his head and looked at Hector de Brian.

"I say what I mean," replied the latter; "and see, there on the threshold is some one who seems to be of my opinion."

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated by the young man, and they saw Carmainges, with pale face, standing in the frame formed by the doorway. At sight of him, who seemed an apparition, each felt a shiver run through his whole body.

Ernauton descended from the threshold as the statue of a commander would have stepped down from his pedestal, and walked straight to Sainte Maline, without real provocation, but with a determination which caused more than one heart to beat.

Thereupon, from all sides, they cried out to Monsieur de Carmainges:

"Come here, Ernauton; come over here, Carmainges, here is a seat near me."

"Thanks," replied the young man; "but it is next to Monsieur de Sainte Maline that I wish to sit."

Sainte Maline rose; every eye was on him.

But, as he rose, his face completely changed in expression.

"I will give you the seat you desire, monsieur," said he, without anger; "and in giving it to you I will offer you very frank and very sincere apologies for my stupid attack of a while ago; I was drunk. You said so yourself; forgive me."

This declaration, made in the midst of the general silence, did not satisfy Ernauton, although it was evident that not a syllable had been lost by the forty-three guests, who were anxiously watching for the end of the scene.

But at the last words of Sainte Maline, the shouts of joy from his companions showed to Ernauton that he must appear satisfied, and that he was fully avenged.

His good sense therefore forced him to keep silent.

At the same time a glance given by him to Sainte Maline showed the latter that he should mistrust him more than ever.

"This villain is brave, however," said Ernauton to himself in a low tone, "and if he yields now it is because of some evil idea which pleases him more."

Sainte Maline's glass was full; he filled Ernauton's.

"Come! come! Peace! peace!" cried all the voices. "To the reconciliation of Carmainges and Sainte Maline."

Carmainges took advantage of the clinking of the glasses and the sound of all the voices, and leaning towards Sainte Maline with a smile on his lips, so that no one might suspect the purport of the words which he addressed to him.

"Monsieur de Sainte Maline," said he, "this is the second time you have insulted me without giving me satisfaction. Take care; at the third offence I will kill you like a dog."

"Do so, monsieur, if you think you should," replied Sainte Maline; "for on my honor as a gentleman, in your place I would do as much."

And the two mortal enemies touched their glasses, as the best of friends would have done.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE.

While the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*, apparently a place of the most perfect concord, with closed doors but open cellars, was giving out through the chinks of its shutters the light of the candles and the happiness of its guests, an unusual event was taking place in the mysterious house of which our readers have seen only the outside as described in the pages of this story.

The servant with the bald head had come and gone from one room to another, carrying here and there articles which he wrapped up and packed away in a travelling box.

These first preparations completed, he loaded a pistol and placed a large dagger in its velvet sheath; then by means of a ring, he hung it to the chain which served him as a belt; to the latter he also attached his pistol, a bunch of keys, and a prayer-book bound in black shagreen.

While he was thus occupied, a light step like that of a shadow touched the floor of the first story and glided down the stairs.

Suddenly a woman, pale and looking like a spirit under the folds of her white veil, appeared on the threshold of the door, and a voice as gentle and sad as the song of a bird in the depths of a forest was heard.

"Rémy," said this voice, "are you ready?"

"Yes, madame, and I am now waiting only to add your box to mine."

"Do you think these boxes can be easily packed on our horses?"

"I will answer for it, madame; besides, if it gives you the least trouble, we can give up carrying mine; have I not everything in that one which I need?"

"No, Rémy, no; on no account am I willing that you should lack for the necessaries on the journey; and then, once there, the poor old man being ill, all the servants will be occupied with him. Oh! Rémy, I am in haste to reach my father; I have gloomy presentiments, and it seems to me a century since I saw him."

"And yet, madame," said Rémy, "you left him only three

months ago, and the interval is no longer between this journey and the last than between the others."

"Rémy, you are such a good physician, did you yourself not admit, on leaving my father the last time, that he had not long to live?"

"Yes, no doubt; but it was an expressed fear, and not a fulfilled prediction. God sometimes forgets old men, and, strange to say, they live from a habit of living; more than that, even: sometimes an old man is like a child, ill to-day, well to-morrow."

"Alas, Rémy, and like the child too, the old man well to-day, to-morrow is dead."

Rémy did not answer, for no encouraging reply could really come from his lips. For a few minutes a gloomy silence succeeded the conversation we have just narrated.

Each of the two speakers remained sad and thoughtful.

"At what hour did you order the horses, Rémy?" the mysterious lady asked at last.

"At two o'clock in the morning."

"One o'clock has just struck."

"Yes, madame."

"No one is watching outside, Rémy?"

"No one."

"Not even that wretched young man?"

"Not even he!"

Rémy sighed.

"You tell me that in a strange tone, Rémy."

"It is because the young man has made a resolution."

"What?" asked the lady, with a start.

"Not to see us any more, or at least not to try to see us any more."

"And where is he going?"

"Whither we are all going; to rest."

"God give him eternal rest!" replied the lady, in a voice as cold and mournful as a death knell, "and yet" —

She paused.

"And yet?" said Rémy.

"Had he nothing to do in this world?"

"He would have loved, had he been loved in return."

"A man of his name, rank, and age ought to think of the future."

"Do you think of it, madame, you who are of an age, rank, and name which his might envy?"

The eyes of the lady shot forth a sinister glance.

"Yes, Rémy," said she, "I think of it, since I live; but listen" —

She bent her head.

"Do I not hear the trot of a horse?"

"Yes, it seems so to me."

"Could it be our guide already?"

"Possibly; but in that case he will be an hour ahead of the appointed time."

"Some one is stopping at the door, Rémy."

"Yes."

Rémy hastily went down, and reached the foot of the stairs just as three rapid knocks were given on the door.

"Who is it?" asked Rémy.

"I," replied a trembling, broken voice, "I, Grandchamp, the valet of the baron."

"Ah! my God! you, Grandchamp, you in Paris! Wait until I open the door for you; but speak softly."

He opened the door.

"Whence do you come?" asked Rémy, in a low tone.

"From Méridor."

"From Méridor?"

"Yes, dear Monsieur Rémy, — alas!"

"Come in, come in quickly. My God!"

"Well, Rémy," asked the lady's voice from the top of the stairs, "are they our horses?"

"No, no, madame."

Then returning to the old man:

"What is the matter, my good Grandchamp?"

"You do not guess?" replied the servant.

"Alas! yes, I guess; but in Heaven's name do not tell her this news suddenly. Oh! what will she say, poor lady?"

"Rémy, Rémy," said the voice, "you are speaking with some one, it seems to me."

"Yes, madame, yes."

"With some one whose voice I recognize."

"Indeed, madame — How shall I tell it, Grandchamp? — here she is!"

The lady, who had descended from the first floor to the one below, as she had already descended from the second to the first, appeared at the end of the corridor.

"Who is here?" she asked; "I should say it was Grandchamp."

"Yes, madame, it is I," replied the old man, humbly and sadly, uncovering his white head.

"You, Grandchamp! Oh, my God! my presentiments were not wrong, my father is dead!"

"It is true, madame," replied Grandchamp, forgetting every warning of Rémy, "it is true, Méridor no longer has a master."

Pale, icy, but motionless and firm, the lady bore the blow without flinching.

Rémy, seeing her so resigned and so sad, went to her and gently took her hand.

"How did he die?" asked the lady. "Tell me, my friend?"

"Madame, Monsieur le Baron, who no longer left his armchair, had a third stroke of apoplexy a week ago. He was able to stammer your name a last time, then he ceased speaking, and died during the night."

Diana made a gesture of thanks to the aged servant, then without another word she went upstairs to her room.

"At last she is free," murmured Rémy, more gloomy and more pale than the lady herself.

"Come Grandchamp, come."

The lady's apartment was on the first floor, behind a small room which fronted the street, while the apartment itself obtained its only light from a small window overlooking the court.

The furniture of the room was sombre but rich. The hangings were of Arras tapestry, the most beautiful tapestry made at that time, and represented various subjects of the Passion.

A *prie-dieu* of sculptured oak, a stall of the same wood and workmanship, a bed with twisted posts having curtains similar to the tapestry on the walls, and a carpet from Bruges; these were the only ornaments of the chamber.

Not a flower, not a jewel, not a touch of gilding; wood and bronze everywhere took the place of silver and gold. A frame of black wood containing the portrait of a man hung on the front wall, upon which fell the light from the window, evidently made for that purpose.

It was before this portrait that the lady knelt with swelling heart but dry eyes.

IT WAS BEFORE THIS PORTRAIT THAT THE LADY KNELT WITH SWELLING HEART.

She fixed on the inanimate face a long and indescribable look of love, as if the noble image was about to come to life and answer her.

A noble face, indeed, and the epithet seemed made for it. The painter had represented a young man of twenty-eight or thirty, lying half dressed on a couch; from his half open breast a few drops of blood still fell; his right hand hung down, mutilated, yet it still held a broken piece of a sword.

His eyes were closed like those of a man about to die; pallor and suffering gave to his face a divine look which the face of man does not begin to assume until the moment when he is leaving life for eternity.

The only words, the only device, could be read under the portrait in letters as red as blood:

Aut Cæsar aut nihil.

The lady extended her arms toward the picture. and invoked it as she might have done a god:

"I begged you to wait, although your irritated soul must have been thirsty for revenge," said she, "and as the dead see everything, you must have seen that I have lived only in order to keep from becoming a parricide; you dead, I too should have died; but by dying I should have killed my father. And then, you know that on your bloody corpse I made a vow; I swore to pay death with death, blood with blood; but in that case I should have burdened with a crime the white head of the true old man who called me his innocent child.

"You have waited; thank you, my well-beloved; you have waited, and now I am free; the last link which chained me to earth has just been broken by the Lord; to the Lord let thanks be given. I am wholly yours; no more hiding, no more ambush. I can act openly, for now as I no longer will leave any one behind me on the earth, I have the right to leave it."

She rose on one knee and kissed the hand, which seemed to hang outside of the frame.

"You will forgive me, my friend," said she, "for having dry eyes; it is from having wept at your tomb that my eyes have become so, these eyes you loved so well. In a few months I shall rejoin you, and you will answer me at last, dear shade, to whom I have spoken so much without ever receiving a reply."

At these words, Diana rose respectfully as if she had finished talking with God and sat down on her oak stall.

"Poor father!" she murmured, in a cold tone and with an expression which seemed to belong to no other human being.

Then she fell into a sombre reverie which apparently made her forget her present trouble as well as her past. Suddenly she rose, her hand resting on the arm of the chair.

"That is it," said she, "and in that way everything will be better. Rémy."

The faithful servant no doubt was listening at the door, for he appeared at once.

"Here I am, madame," he replied.

"My worthy friend, my brother," said Diana, "you, the only one in the world who understands me, bid me farewell."

"Why, madame?"

"Because the time has come for us to part, Rémy."

"For us to part!" exclaimed the young man, in a tone which made his companion start. "What are you saying, madame?"

"Yes, Rémy. This scheme of revenge seemed to me noble and pure so long as there was an obstacle between him and me, so long as I saw it only in the distance; so are the things of this world great and beautiful from afar. Now that I am near to the execution of our plan, now that the obstacle has disappeared, I do not recoil, Rémy; but I do not want to drag after me along the road of crime a generous and spotless soul, so you will leave me, my friend. All this life spent in tears will count for me as an expiation before God and before you, and it will also count with you, I trust; and you who have never done and who never will do any wrong, you will be doubly sure of Heaven."

Rémy listened to the words of the lady of Monsoreau with a gloomy, almost haughty air.

"Madame," he replied, "do you think you are speaking to an old man trembling and worn out from the abuse of life? Madame, I am twenty-six years old. I have all the vigor of youth, which seems dried up in me. A corpse snatched from the tomb, if I still live it is in order to accomplish a terrible deed, it is in order to take an active part in the work of Providence. Never separate my thought from yours, then, madame, since these two sinister thoughts have so long dwelt under the same roof; where you go, I will go; what you do, I will help;

unless, madame, and in spite of my prayers, you persist in this determination to drive" —

"Oh!" murmured the young woman, "drive you away! What words are you using, Rémy?"

"If you persist in this resolution," continued the young man, as if she had not spoken, "I know what I shall do; and all our studies, become useless, shall end for me in two thrusts of my dagger: one which I shall give to the heart of the one you know, the other to my own."

"Rémy, Rémy!" cried Diana, taking a step towards the young man and raising her hand imperatively above her head, "Rémy, do not say that. The life of the one you threaten does not belong to you, it is mine; I have paid dearly enough for it to take it myself when the moment comes for him to lose it. You know what has happened, Rémy, and it is not a dream. I swear to you, the day when I knelt before the already cold body of him," — and she pointed to the portrait, — "that day, I say, I laid my lips on the lips of the wound you see open, and those lips trembled and said to me:

"'Avenge me, Diana, avenge me!'"

"Madame!"

"Rémy, I repeat that it was not an illusion, it was not a fancy of my delirium; the wound spoke, it spoke, I tell you, and I still hear it whispering: 'Avenge me, Diana, avenge me!'"

The servant lowered his head.

"Therefore the vengeance is for me and not for you," continued Diana; "besides, for whom and by whom did he die? For me and by me."

"I ought to obey you, madame," replied Rémy, "for I was as dead as he. Who had me carried away from the midst of the corpses with which that room was filled? you. Who cured me of my wounds? you. Who hid me? you, you; that is, the half of the soul of the one for which I had so gladly died; command, therefore, I will obey, provided that you do not order me to leave you."

"Very well, Rémy, follow my fortune, then; you are right. Nothing ought to separate us."

Rémy pointed to the portrait.

"Now, madame," said he with energy, "he was killed by treason, by treason should he be avenged. Ah! you do not know one thing; you are right, the hand of God is with us;

you do not know that, that night, I found the secret of the *aqua tofana*, the poison of the Médicis, the poison of René the Florentine."

"Ah! you are speaking the truth?"

"Come and see, madame, come and see."

"But Grandchamp is waiting; what will he say at not seeing us come back again, at not hearing us any more? for it is downstairs, is it not, that you wish to take me?"

"The poor old man has ridden sixty miles, madame; he is worn out and has gone to sleep on my bed. Come."

Diana followed Rémy.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE LABORATORY.

Rémy led the unknown lady into the next room, and pushing a spring hidden under a plank of the floor, he brought to light a trap-door which slid from the centre of the room to the wall.

On opening, this trap-door showed a stairway, dark, steep, and narrow. Rémy went down first and held out his hand to Diana, who leaned on it and descended behind him. Twenty steps of this stairway, or rather of this ladder, led to a circular cave, black and damp, the entire furniture of which was a furnace with its immense oven, a square table, two rush chairs, and a quantity of vials and iron boxes.

The only inmates were a half-dead goat and some birds without voices, which looked in this dark underground place like the spectres of the animals which they resembled, and not the animals themselves.

In the furnace the remains of a fire were dying out, while a thick black smoke was silently escaping by a pipe in the wall.

An alembic placed in the oven filtered slowly, drop by drop, a liquid as yellow as gold. These drops fell into a vial of white glass, two fingers thick, but at the same time perfectly transparent and closed by the tube of the alembic, which communicated with it.

Diana descended and stopped, without surprise and without fear, in the midst of all these objects of strange form and

existence; one would have said that the ordinary emotions of life made no further impressions on this woman who already lived outside of life. Rémy signed to her to stop at the foot of the stairway; she did so.

The young man lighted a lamp, which threw a livid glare on the objects we have just described, and which up to that time had slept or moved in darkness.

Then he approached a well dug in the cave near the wall, and which had neither parapet nor margin, attached a bucket by a long rope, and without a pulley let the rope down into the water, which was sleeping gloomily at the bottom of the funnel, and which gave out a splashing sound. Then he drew up the bucket filled with water as cool and fresh as crystal.

"Come here, madame," said Rémy.

Diana approached.

Rémy poured a single drop of the liquid contained in the glass vial into the enormous quantity of water, and the entire mass instantly became tinged with yellow; then this color evaporated, and at the end of ten minutes the water had become as transparent as before. The fixity of Diana's gaze alone gave an idea of the close attention with which she watched the operation. Rémy looked at her.

"Well?" said she.

"Well," said Rémy, "now into this water, which has neither taste nor color, dip a flower, a glove, or a handkerchief; mix with this water some scented soap, pour it into the basin used for washing the teeth, hands, and face, and you will see, as they formerly saw at the court of King Charles IV., the flower suffocated by its own perfume, the glove poisoned by contact, the soap killed by its introduction into the pores. Pour a single drop of this pure oil on the wick of a candle or a lamp — the cotton will become saturated and for one hour the candle or the lamp will exhale death, and burn afterwards as innocently as any other lamp or candle."

"You are sure of what you say about this, Rémy?" asked Diana.

"I have made all these experiments, madame; see these birds which cannot sleep, and which want nothing more to eat; they have drunk water similar to this water. See this goat, which has browsed on grass sprinkled with this same water. It bleats, and its eyes vacillate; it would be in vain for us to give it back liberty, light, or nature now; its life is condemned;

at least this nature to which we might return it instinctively reveals some of the counter-poisons which animals divine, and of which men are ignorant."

"May I see the vial, Rémy?" asked Diana.

"Yes, madame, for all of the liquid is precipitated by this time; but wait."

With infinite precaution, Rémy separated it from the alembic; then he corked it up with a plug of soft wax, which he flattened over the mouth of the opening, and, covering this opening with a piece of wool, he handed the vial to his companion.

Diana took it without any emotion, raised it on a level with the lamp, and having for some moments gazed at the thick liquid which it contained:

"It will do," said she; "we will choose, when the time comes, either a flower, a pair of gloves, a lamp, a piece of soap, or a basin. Does the liquid keep in metal?"

"It corrodes it."

"But this flask may possibly break."

"I think not; see the thickness of the crystal; besides, we can enclose it or rather encase it in a gold wrapper."

"So, Rémy," continued the lady, "you are content, are you not?"

And something like a pale smile touched the lips of the lady and gave them that reflection of life which a moonbeam throws on benumbed objects.

"More than ever, madame," replied the man; "to punish the wicked is to enjoy the holy prerogative of God."

"Listen, Rémy, listen!"

And the lady bent her head.

"Did you hear a noise?"

"The stamping of horses in the street, it seems to me; Rémy, our horses have arrived."

"Probably, madame, for it is almost time; but I will send them back."

"Why?"

"Are they not useless now?"

"Instead of going to Méridor, Rémy, we will go to Flanders; keep the horses."

"Ah! I understand."

And the eyes of the servant in turn gave out a gleam of joy which could be compared only to Diana's smile.

"But Grandchamp," he added, "what shall we do with him?"

"Grandchamp needs to rest, as I told you. He shall remain in Paris and sell this house, which we no longer need. But you must give back liberty to all these poor innocent animals which we have been obliged to make suffer. You said that God would perhaps provide for their safety."

"But all these furnaces, these retorts, these alembics?"

"Since they were here when we bought the house, what matters it if others find them here after we leave?"

"But the powder, the acids, the essences."

"Burn them, Rémy, burn them!"

"Then step back."

"I?"

"Yes, and at least put on this glass mask."

Rémy handed Diana a mask, which she held before her face. Then, covering his own mouth and nose with a large piece of wool, he pressed the cord of the bellows, brightened the flame of the charcoal; and when the fire was well kindled, he poured into it the powders, which burst into joyous crackling, some throwing out green flames, others volatilizing in sparks as pale as sulphur, and the essences, which, instead of extinguishing the flame, rose like fiery serpents in the pipe, with rumblings like those of distant thunder. At length, when everything was consumed:

"You are right, madame," said Rémy, "if any one should now discover the secret of this cellar, he would think that a chemist had lived in it. They still burn sorcerers nowadays, but they respect chemists."

"And besides," said the lady, "if they burn us, Rémy, it would be justice, it seems to me; are we not poisoners? and provided that I have accomplished my task the day when I mount my funeral pyre, I shall be repelled no more by that kind of death than by any other; the most of the ancient martyrs died in such a way."

Rémy made a gesture of assent, and taking his vial from the hands of his mistress, he wrapped it up carefully. Just then there came a knock at the street door.

"It is your servants, madame; you were not mistaken. Quick, go up and answer while I close the trap."

The lady obeyed. The same thought so lived in these two minds that it would have been difficult to say which one bent to the will of the other.

Rémy ascended behind Diana, touched the spring, and the cave was closed. Diana found Grandchamp at the door. Awakened by the noise, he had come to open it. The old man was greatly surprised when he heard of the approaching departure of his mistress, who told him of the journey without saying where she was going.

"Grandchamp, my friend," said she, "Rémy and I are going on a journey we planned a long time ago; you will speak of it to no one, and you will reveal my name to no one, whoever he may be."

"Oh! I promise you, madame," said the aged servant. "But we shall see you again?"

"Without doubt, Grandchamp, without doubt; do we not always see our friends again, if not in this world, at least in the next? But by the way, Grandchamp, this house has become useless to us."

Diana drew a file of papers from a chest of drawers.

"These are the letters which prove the ownership; you will rent or sell the house. If one month from now you have found neither tenant nor buyer, you will simply leave it and return to Méridor."

"And if I find a buyer, madame, for how much shall I sell it?"

"For as much as you please."

"And I am to take the money to Méridor?"

"You will keep it for yourself, my aged Grandchamp."

"What, madame, such a sum?"

"Certainly. Do I not give it to you for your kind services, Grandchamp? and then, besides my debts to you, have I not those of my father to pay also?"

"But, madame, without contract and power of attorney I can do nothing."

"He is right," said Rémy.

"Find some way," said Diana.

"Nothing is simpler. This house was bought in my name; I will sell it to Grandchamp, who in this way will be able to sell it, himself, to whomsoever he pleases."

"Make it over to me."

Rémy took a pen and wrote his deed of gift below the contract of sale.

"Now, adieu," said the lady of Monsoreau to Grandchamp, who was greatly affected at remaining alone in the house,

"adieu, Grandchamp; have the horses brought to the door while I finish my packing."

Diana ascended to her own room, cut out with a dagger the canvas of the portrait, rolled it, covered it with a piece of silk, and placed it in the travelling-box. The frame, left empty, yawned and seemed to tell more eloquently than ever before all the griefs it had heard. The rest of the chamber, now that the portrait had been removed, had no longer any individuality and became an ordinary room.

When Rémy had strapped the two boxes with rope, he gave a last glance into the street to assure himself that no one had stopped there except the guide; then, aiding his pale mistress to mount her horse:

"I think, madame," said he in a low tone, "that this house will be the last in which we shall stay for so long."

"The next to the last, Rémy," said the lady, in her grave, monotonous voice.

"What will the other one be?"

"The tomb. Rémy."

CHAPTER LXIII.

WHAT MONSEIGNEUR FRANCIS OF FRANCE, THE DUC D'ANJOU, AND DE BRABANT, COUNT OF FLANDERS, WERE DOING.

Our readers will now permit us to leave the King at the Louvre, Henry of Navarre at Cahors, Chicot on the highway, and the lady of Monsoreau in the street, and turn to Flanders to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, recently appointed Duke of Brabant, in whose aid we have seen the Grand Admiral of France, Anne Daigues, Duc de Joyeuse, advancing.

Eighty leagues from Paris, towards the north, the sound of French voices and the flag of France were floating over a French camp on the banks of the Scheldt. It was night; some fires disposed in an immense circle along the bank of the river, which was very wide in front of Antwerp, were reflected in its deep waters. The customary solitude of the polders and the sombre verdure was broken by the neighing of French horses. From the height of the city ramparts the sentinels saw shining in the fire of the bivouacs the gun of the French sentinels, a fleeting and distant gleam, which the width of the

river, lying between the army and the city, rendered as inoffensive as heat-lightning shining on the horizon on a clear summer night. The army was that of the Duc d'Anjou. We must tell our readers what it was going to do there. Perhaps it will not be interesting, but they will forgive us, in consideration of the caution; so many are wearied without having been warned!

Those of our readers who have been willing to turn over the pages of *Queen Marguerite of Valois* and *The Lady of Monsoreau* are already acquainted with Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, that jealous, egotistical, ambitious, and impatient prince, who, born so near the throne, to which each event seemed to draw him nearer, had never been able to wait with patience until death should clear the way. So at first he had coveted the throne of Navarre under Charles IX., then that of Charles IX. himself, and finally that of France, occupied by his brother Henry, ex-King of Poland, who had worn two crowns, to the jealousy of his brother, who had never been able to secure one.

For a time he had turned his eyes towards England, governed by a woman, and in order to have the throne he had asked the woman in marriage, although she was called Elizabeth and was twenty years older than he.

At this point fate had begun to smile on him, if it would have been a smile of fate to marry the proud daughter of Henry VIII. He who all his life in his forward desires had not been able to succeed even in defending his liberty; who had seen killed, perhaps even had killed, his favorites, La Mole and Coconnas, and basely sacrificed Bussy, the bravest of his gentlemen, — the whole without advantage to his elevation and with great damage to his fame, — this man, repudiated by fortune, suddenly saw himself overwhelmed with the favors of a powerful queen, inaccessible up to then to any mortal glance, and raised by a whole people to the highest dignity which this people could confer. The inhabitants of Flanders offered him a crown and Elizabeth gave him her ring.

We do not pretend to be an historian; if occasionally we become one, it is when history chances to descend to the level of romance, or better yet, when romance rises to the height of history; it is then that we plunge our inquisitive glances into the princely existence of the Duc d'Anjou, an existence which, always side by side with the illustrious path of royalty, is full

of those events, sometimes sombre, sometimes brilliant, which are usually noticed only in the lives of kings.

Let us, therefore, in a few words trace the history of his life. He had seen his brother, Henry III., involved in a quarrel with the De Guises, and he had allied himself to the De Guises; but he soon perceived that the latter had no real aim except that of substituting themselves for the Valois on the throne of France. Thereupon he separated from the De Guises; but, as we have seen, this separation took place not without some danger, and Salcède, executed on the Grève, had proved the importance which the susceptibility of Messieurs de Lorraine had attached to the friendship of Monsieur d'Anjou. Moreover, a long time before, Henry III. had opened his eyes, and one year previous to the beginning of this story the Duc d'Alençon, exiled or almost so, had retired to Amboise. It is then that the Flemish had opened their arms to him. Wearied by the Spanish domination, decimated by the proconsulship of the Duc d'Alba, deceived by the false peace of Don Juan of Austria, who had taken advantage of this peace to retake Namier and Charlemont, the Flemish had called William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, to them and had made him governor-general of Brabant.

One word about this new personage, who has held such an important place in history, but who will appear but seldom in our story.

William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, was at that time fifty or fifty-one years of age; son of William of Nassau, called the Old, and of Julienne of Stolberg, cousin of that René of Nassau killed at the siege of Saint Dizier, he had inherited his title of Prince of Orange, and while still young had been brought up in the severest principles of the Reformation. He had, we say, while still young, realized his strength and measured the importance of his mission. This mission, which he believed he had received from Heaven, to which he was true all his life, and for which he died the death of a martyr, was to establish the Republic of Holland, which as a matter of fact he founded. When a young man he had been summoned by Charles V. to his court. Charles V. was a judge of men; he had weighed William, and the old emperor, who at that time was holding in his hand the heaviest burden that an imperial hand had ever carried, frequently consulted the lad on the most delicate political matters regarding the Nether-

lands. Furthermore, the young man was scarcely twenty-four years of age when Charles V., in the absence of the famous Philibert Emmanuel of Savoy, entrusted to him the command of the army of Flanders. William proved himself worthy of this high esteem: he held in check the Duke of Nevers and Coligny, two of the greatest captains of the time, and before their eyes he fortified Philippeville and Charlemont; the day on which Charles V. abdicated, it was on William of Nassau that he leaned, to descend the steps of the throne, and it was he whom he charged to carry to Ferdinand the imperial crown which Charles V. had just resigned voluntarily.

Then came Philip II., and in spite of the command of Charles V. to his son to look on William as a brother, the latter soon felt that Philip II. was one of those princes who do not care to have relatives. So he now shut up in his own mind his great project to free Holland and emancipate Flanders, which perhaps would have lain dormant in his mind forever if the old Emperor, his friend and his father, had not had the strange idea of substituting a monk's gown for the royal mantle. Then the Low Countries, at the suggestion of William, demanded the recall of the foreign troops; then began that frightful struggle of Spain to retain the prey which was escaping her; then there passed over to that unhappy people, always bruised between France and the Empire, the vice-royalty of Marguerite of Austria, and the bloody proconsulship of the Duc d'Alba; then was organized that contest at once political and religious, the pretext for which was the protest of the Hôtel de Culembourg, which demanded the abolition of the Inquisition in the Netherlands; then advanced that procession of four hundred gentlemen clothed with the greatest simplicity, walking two by two, and bringing to the foot of the throne of the vice-governor the expression of the general wish, set forth in this protest; then, at sight of those men so earnest and so plainly dressed, there escaped from Barlaimont, one of the councillors of the duchess, that word "*gueux*" (beggars), which, taken up and accepted by the Flemish, designated thenceforth in the Netherlands the patriotic party, until then without a name.

From this moment William began to play the part which made him one of the greatest political actors the world has ever had. Repeatedly overthrown in the struggle against the crushing power of Philip II., he arose repeatedly, always

stronger after his defeats, always raising a new army to replace the army which had been scattered, routed, or annihilated. He reappeared stronger than before his defeat, and was always hailed as a liberator.

It was in the midst of these alternatives of moral triumphs and physical defeats, if we may so express it, that William learned at Mons the news of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

This was a terrible blow, which almost touched the heart of the Netherlands. By this wound Holland, and that portion of Flanders which was Calvinistic, lost the bravest blood of their natural allies, the Huguenots of France.

William replied to this news at first by a retreat, as was his custom. From Mons, where he was, he withdrew to the Rhine, and waited.

Events rarely injure a worthy cause.

News which it was impossible to expect was at once circulated. Certain sea beggars — there were sea beggars as well as land beggars — certain sea beggars, driven by an ill wind into the port of Brille, seeing that they could in no way regain the open sea, let themselves drift, and, compelled by despair, they took the town which already had prepared gibbets on which to hang them. The city captured, they drove the Spanish garrison from the neighborhood, and not finding among them a man strong enough to utilize the success they owed to chance, they called on the Prince of Orange. William hastened to them; it was necessary to strike a great blow; it was necessary, by involving all Holland, to render a reconciliation with Spain forever impossible.

William issued an order which proscribed the Catholic religion in Holland as the Protestant religion was proscribed in France.

At this manifesto the war began anew: the Duc d'Alba sent against the rebels his own son, Frederic of Toledo, who captured Zutphen, Nardem, and Haarlem; but this check, far from crushing the Dutch, seemed to give them new strength. Every one rose; all took up arms, from the Zuyder Zee to the Scheldt. For an instant Spain was frightened, recalled the Duc d'Alba, and sent as his successor Don Louis of Requesens, one of the conquerors of Lepanto. Then began a new series of misfortunes for William: Ludovic and Henry of Nassau, who were bringing aid to the Prince of Orange, were surprised by

one of the lieutenants of Don Louis, near Nimeguen, defeated, and killed; the Spaniards penetrated into Holland, laid siege to Leyden, and sacked Antwerp. All were in despair, when Providence a second time came to the aid of the rising republic. Requesens died at Brussels. Then all the provinces, united by a single interest, drew up with one accord and signed, on the eighth of November, 1576, — that is to say, four days after the sack of Antwerp, — the treaty known as the Peace of Ghent. By this they pledged themselves to aid one another in delivering their country from the yoke of the Spaniards *and of other foreigners*. Don Juan reappeared and with him the ill fortune of the Low Countries. In less than two months Namur and Charlemont were taken.

The Flemish responded to these two blows by appointing the Prince of Orange governor-general of Brabant. Don Juan died in turn. Evidently God was deciding in favor of the freedom of the Low Countries.

Don Juan was succeeded by Alexander Farnese. The latter was a clever prince, charming in manner, at once gentle and strong, a clever politician and a good general.

Flanders trembled upon hearing for the first time that melodious Italian voice call her friend instead of treating her as a rebel.

William understood that Farnese would do more for Spain with his promises than the Duc d'Alba with his tortures.

On the twenty-ninth of January, 1579, he made the provinces sign the Union of Utrecht, which was the fundamental basis of the public law of Holland. It was then that, fearing he could not execute by himself this plan of freedom for which he had been struggling for fifteen years, he offered to the Duc d'Anjou the sovereignty of the Netherlands, on condition that he would acknowledge the privileges of the Dutch and the Flemish and respect their freedom of conscience.

This was a terrible blow to Philip II. He responded to it by putting the price of 25,000 crowns on the head of William.

The States-General at the Hague then declared Philip II. deprived of the sovereignty of the Netherlands, and ordered that henceforth the oath of fealty should be made to them instead of to the king of Spain.

It was at this time that the Duc d'Anjou entered Belgium and was received there by the Flemish with the distrust which they felt for all strangers. But the support of France prom-

ised by the French was too important for them not to give him a kind and respectful welcome, at least apparently.

But the promise of Philip II. bore its fruit. In the midst of the fêtes for his reception, a pistol was fired at the side of the Prince of Orange; William staggered; they thought he was mortally wounded, but Holland still had need of him. The ball of the assassin had merely gone through both cheeks. The one who fired the shot was Jean Jaureguy, the forerunner of Balthazar Gerard, as Jean Chatel was the forerunner of Ravillac.

From all these events there remained to William a gloomy melancholy which was rarely lightened by a pensive smile. Flemish and Dutch respected this dreamer as they would have respected a god, for they felt that in him, and in him alone, lay their future; and when they saw him advance, wrapped in his wide cloak, his brow darkened by the shadow of his hat, his elbow in his left hand, his chin in his right, the men drew aside to make way for him; and mothers with a certain religious superstition pointed him out to their children, saying to them:

"Look, my son, that is the Silent."

At the suggestion of William, the Flemish then had chosen Francis of Valois, Duke of Brabant, Count of Flanders; that is, sovereign prince. This did not prevent Elizabeth from letting him hope for her hand. Rather the contrary. She saw in this alliance a means of reuniting with the Calvinists of England those of Flanders and France; in her wisdom she perhaps dreamed of a triple crown.

The Prince of Orange apparently favored the Duc d'Anjou, making for himself a provisional cloak of his popularity; ready to take from him the cloak when he thought the time had come to rid himself of the French power as he had rid himself of Spanish tyranny. This hypocritical ally was more formidable to the Duc d'Anjou than an enemy; he paralyzed the execution of every plan which might have given him too great power or too high influence in Flanders.

Philip II., seeing the entrance of a French prince in Brussels, had called the Duc de Guise to his aid, and this aid he claimed by virtue of a treaty once made between Don Juan of Austria and Henry de Guise.

The two young heroes, who were almost of the same age, had divined each other and by associating their ambitions had each pledged to conquer a kingdom for himself.

When on the death of his much feared brother, Philip II. found among the papers of the young prince the treaty signed by Henri de Guise, he did not seem to care. Besides, of what use to trouble himself about the ambition of a dead man? Did not the tomb hold the sword which could animate the letter? But a king of the strength of Philip II., who knew of what political importance two lines written by certain hands can be, could not leave in a collection of manuscripts and autographs, the attraction of visitors to the Escurial, the signature of Henri de Guise, a signature which was beginning to receive much credit among those dealers in royalty called the Oranges, the Valois, the Hapsbourgs, and the Tudors.

Philip II., therefore, prevailed on the Duc de Guise to continue with him the treaty made with Don Juan, a treaty the tenor of which was that Lorraine should support Spain in the possession of Flanders while Spain should aid Lorraine to bring to good issue the hereditary counsel which the cardinal had formerly ingrafted in his house. This hereditary counsel was nothing else than not to suspend for an instant the eternal labor which some fine day was to lead the workers to the usurpation of the kingdom of France.

De Guise consented; he could scarcely do otherwise. Philip II. threatened to send a duplicate treaty to Henry of France, and it was then that the Spaniard and the Lorraine sent to assassinate the Duc d'Anjou, conqueror and king in Flanders, Salcède, a Spaniard belonging to the house of Lorraine.

In fact, an assassination would end everything satisfactorily to the Spaniard and the Lorraine.

The Duc d'Anjou dead, there would be no further pretender to the throne of Flanders, no further successor to the crown of France.

The Prince of Orange would remain, but, as we already know, Philip II. held in readiness another Salcède named Jean Jaureguy.

Salcède was captured and executed on the Place de Grève, without having carried out his plan.

Jean Jaureguy wounded the Prince of Orange seriously, but it was nothing more than a wound.

The Duc d'Anjou and the Silent remained, therefore, apparently good friends, but in reality greater enemies than were those who wished to have them assassinated.

As we have said, the Duc d'Anjou had been received with

distrust. Brussels had opened its gates to him; but Brussels was neither Flanders nor Brabant; he had begun, therefore, either by persuasion or by force to advance into the Low Countries, to capture city by city, piece by piece, his reluctant kingdom; and at the suggestion of the Prince of Orange, who understood the Flemish sensitiveness, to devour leaf by leaf, as Cæsar Borgia would have said, the savory artichoke of Flanders.

The Flemish, on their side, did not defend themselves very brutally; they felt that the Duc d'Anjou would protect them vigorously against the Spaniards; to be sure, they were slow to accept their liberator, but at last they did accept him.

Francis, seeing that he advanced only step by step, grew impatient and stamped his foot.

"These people are slow and timid," said Francis to his good friends; "wait."

"These people are treacherous and fickle," said the Silent to the prince; "force them."

The result was that the duke, whose natural pride further exaggerated the slowness of the Flemish into a defeat, set to work to take by force the towns which did not yield as readily as he desired.

It was here that he was expected by his ally, the Silent, Prince of Orange, and his most gloomy enemy, Philip II., who were watching each other.

After some success, the Duc d'Anjou had encamped before Antwerp, to force this town, which the Duc d'Alba, Requesens, Don Juan, and the Duke of Parma had in turn bent under their yoke, without ever having exhausted it, and without ever for an instant having reduced it to slavery.

Antwerp had called the Duc d'Anjou to its aid against Alexander Farnese; when the Duc d'Anjou, in turn, wished to enter Antwerp, Antwerp pointed its guns at him.

Such was the position in which Francis of France was placed when we meet him in this story, the day after that on which Joyeuse and his fleet had joined him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE.

The camp of the new Duke of Brabant was situated on both banks of the Scheldt; the army, well disciplined, was, however, agitated by a spirit of unrest easy to understand.

In short, many Calvinists were aiding the Duc d'Anjou, not out of sympathy for the aforesaid duke, but in order to be as disagreeable as possible to Spain and the Catholics of France and England; they fought, therefore, rather from pride than from conviction or devotion, and they well knew that, the campaign once over, they would abandon their chief or impose conditions on him.

Besides, the Duc d'Anjou always let it be believed that he would anticipate these conditions. His favorite word was: "Henry of Navarre has become a Catholic, why should not Francis of France turn Huguenot?" On the other side — that is, with the enemy — there existed, on the contrary, in opposition to the moral and political differences, a distinctly arranged cause, the whole perfectly innocent of ambition and anger.

Antwerp at first had intended to surrender, but conditionally and at her own time; she did not exactly refuse the French, but she reserved the right to wait, strong in her situation and in the courage and warlike experience of her inhabitants; moreover, she knew that by extending her arm above the Duc de Guise, who was on watch in Lorraine, she found Alexander Farnese in the Luxembourg. Why, in case of necessity, should she not accept the help of Spain against Anjou as she had accepted the help of Anjou against Spain? — free, after that, to repulse Spain after Spain had aided her in repulsing Anjou.

These monotonous republicans had in them the brazen strength of good sense.

Suddenly they saw a fleet approaching the mouth of the Scheldt, and they learned that this fleet was coming with the grand admiral of France, and that the grand admiral of France was bringing assistance to their enemy.

Since he had laid siege to Antwerp the Duc d'Anjou naturally had become an enemy of the Antwerpers.

On perceiving the fleet, and on learning of the arrival of

Joyeuse, the Calvinists of the Duc d'Anjou made grimaces almost equal to those made by the Flemish. The Calvinists were very brave, but at the same time very jealous; they easily passed by questions of money, but did not like to have their laurels clipped, especially with swords which had served to drain the blood from so many Huguenots on Saint Bartholomew's day.

Hence many quarrels, which began the very evening of the arrival of Joyeuse, and continued triumphantly throughout the following day and the day after.

From the height of their ramparts the Antwerpers had the daily spectacle of ten or twelve duels between Catholics and Huguenots. The polders served as a tilting field, and they threw into the river many more bodies than an affair in open country would have cost the French. If the siege of Antwerp, like that of Troy, had lasted nine years, the besieged would have needed only to look at the besiegers: the latter would certainly have destroyed themselves.

In all these quarrels Francis carried on the office of mediator, but not without enormous difficulties: there had been engagements made with the French Huguenots; to wound these was to withdraw from the moral support of the Flemish Huguenots, who could aid him in Antwerp.

On the other hand, to offend the Catholics sent by the king to die in his service was for the Duc d'Anjou not only an impolitic, but a compromising act The arrival of this reënforcement, on which the Duc d'Anjou himself had not counted, had thrown the Spaniards into commotion, and on their side the Lorraines were bursting with fury. It was indeed something for the Duc d'Anjou to enjoy this twofold satisfaction. But the duke did not manage all parties without causing the discipline of his army to suffer greatly on account of it. Joyeuse, whom the mission had never pleased, we may remember, felt ill at ease in the midst of this gathering of men of such different sentiments; he felt instinctively that the time for success was over. Something like the presentiment of a great defeat was in the air, and in his idleness as courtier, as in his pride as captain, he deplored having come from such a distance to take part in a defeat.

So he thought in his mind, and aloud he said that the Duc d'Anjou had made a great mistake in laying siege to Antwerp. The Prince of Orange, who had given him this treacherous

advice, had disappeared after the advice had been followed, and no one knew what had become of him. His army was in garrison in the city, and he had promised the Duc d'Anjou the support of this army; but there was not the slightest mention of there being any division between the soldiers of William and the Antwerpers, and the news of a single duel between the besieged had not come to gladden the besiegers since they had pitched their camp before the town.

That which Joyeuse especially dwelt on in his opposition to the siege was that the important city of Antwerp was almost a capital; now, to possess an important city with the consent of this important city is a real advantage; but to take by assault the second capital of his future States was to expose himself to the disaffection of the Flemish, and Joyeuse knew the Flemish too well, even supposing that the Duc d'Anjou took Antwerp, to hope that they would not avenge themselves sooner or later, and with interest, for the capture. This opinion Joyeuse expressed aloud in the duke's tent, the very night on which we introduced our readers to the French camp.

While a council was being held among his captains, the duke was seated or rather reclined on a long chair, which at need might be used as a couch, listening, not to the suggestions of the admiral of France, but to the whisperings of his lute-player Aurilly.

Aurilly, by his cowardly complaisance, by his base flattery and constant assiduity, had enchained the favor of the prince; never had he served him as his other friends had done, by offending either the King or any other person of importance; so that he had avoided the rock against which La Mole, Coconnas, Bussy, and many others had been shipwrecked.

With his lute, his love messages, his exact information concerning every one and the intrigues at court, with his clever manœuvres, to throw into the nets of the prince the prey which he coveted, whatever this prey might be, Aurilly had amassed in secret a large fortune, skilfully invested in case of reverses, so that he always seemed to be the poor musician Aurilly, running after a crown, and, like the grasshoppers, singing when hungry.

The influence of this man was immense because it was secret.

Seeing him thus interrupting his developments of strategy and diverting the attention of the duke, Joyeuse retired to the

rear, cutting short the thread of his conversation. Francis appeared as though he were not listening, but as a matter of fact he was listening; so the impatience of Joyeuse did not escape him, and at once:

"Admiral," said he, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing, monseigneur; I am merely waiting until your highness has time to listen to me."

"But I am listening, Monsieur de Joyeuse, I am listening," replied the duke, gayly. "Ah! you Parisians, you think me so dulled by the war in Flanders that you imagine me unable to listen to two people at the same time, when Cæsar dictated seven letters at once!"

"Monseigneur," replied Joyeuse, giving the poor musician a look at which the latter bowed with his customary humility, "I am no singer in need of an accompaniment when speaking."

"Good, good, duke; keep still, Aurilly."

Aurilly bowed.

"So," continued Francis, "you do not approve of my attack on Antwerp, Monsieur de Joyeuse?"

"No, monseigneur."

"And yet I adopted the plan in council."

"Therefore, monseigneur, it is with the greatest reserve that I speak, after so many experienced officers," and Joyeuse, as courtier, bowed to those around him.

Several voices were raised to assure the grand admiral that his opinion was theirs; others without speaking made signs of assent.

"Count de Saint Aignan," said the prince to one of his bravest colonels, "you are not of the opinion of Monsieur de Joyeuse, are you?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Monsieur de Saint Aignan.

"Ah! as you made a grimace" — Every one laughed. Joyeuse turned pale, the count grew crimson.

"If Monsieur le Comte de Saint Aignan," said Joyeuse, "is in the habit of giving his opinion in that manner, he is not a very polite courtier, that is all."

"Monsieur de Joyeuse," said Saint Aignan, quickly, "his highness is wrong to reproach me for an infirmity contracted in his service; at the capture of Cateau Cambrésis I received a blow on my head from a pike, and since then I have had nervous contractions, which cause the grimaces of which his highness complains — However, this is not an excuse I am

giving you, Monsieur de Joyeuse, but an explanation," said the count, proudly turning away.

"No, monsieur," said Joyeuse, holding out his hand to him, "it is a reproach you are making and you are right."

The blood mounted to the face of Duke Francis.

"And to whom this reproach?" said he.

"Why to me, probably, monseigneur."

"Why should Saint Aignan make a reproach to you, Monsieur de Joyeuse, you whom he does not know?"

"Because for an instant I thought that Monsieur Saint Aignan loved your highness so little that he advised you to take Antwerp."

"But," cried the prince, "my position must be defined in the country. I am Duke of Brabant, and Count of Flanders in name, I must be so in deed also. This Silent, who is hiding I know not where, spoke to me of a kingdom. Where is this kingdom? In Antwerp. Where is he? In Antwerp also, probably. Well, we must take Antwerp, and then we shall know where we stand."

"Well! monseigneur, you know that already, on my soul! or in truth you would be less of a good politician than people say. Who advised you to take Antwerp? The Prince of Orange, who disappeared the instant the campaign began; the Prince of Orange, who, while leaving your highness Duke of Brabant, reserved for himself the lieutenant-generalship of the duchy; the Prince of Orange, who is interested in ruining the Spaniards through you, and you through the Spaniards; the Prince of Orange, who will replace you, who will succeed you, if he has not already replaced you and succeeded you; the Prince of Orange — Well! monseigneur, until now, by following the advice of this Prince of Orange, you have done nothing but estrange the Flemish. Let a change for the worse occur and all those who dare not look you in the face will run after you like timid dogs who run after no one but fugitives."

"What! you think that I shall be defeated by wool merchants, by beer drinkers?"

"These wool merchants and beer drinkers caused a great deal of trouble to King Philip of Valois, to Emperor Charles V., and to King Philip II., who were three princes of sufficiently good family, monseigneur, for the comparison not to be very disagreeable to you."

"So you fear a defeat?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I fear it."

"In that case you will not be there, Monsieur de Joyeuse."

"Why, in that case, shall I not be there?"

"Because I wonder that you so doubt your own bravery that you already see yourself fleeing before the Flemish. In any case, reassure yourself; when these prudent merchants march to battle they are accustomed to wrapping themselves up in too heavy armor to have any chance of reaching you, even should they run after you."

"Monseigneur, I do not doubt my courage; I shall be in the first rank, but I shall be defeated in the first rank while others will be defeated in the rear, that is all."

"But still your reasoning is not logical, Monsieur de Joyeuse; you approve of my taking the small towns?"

"I approve of your taking that which is not defended."

"Well! after having taken the small towns which are not defended, as you say, I shall not retreat before the larger one because it is defended, or rather, because it threatens to defend itself."

"Your highness is wrong; it is better to retreat on sure ground than to fall into a ditch by continuing to march forward."

"Very well, I will fall, but I will not retreat."

"In this your highness will do as you please," said Joyeuse, bowing, "and we, on our part, will do as your highness wishes; we are here to obey you."

"That is not answering, duke."

"Nevertheless, that is the only answer I can give your highness."

"Come, prove to me that I am wrong; I ask nothing better than to be of your opinion."

"Monseigneur, see the army of the Prince of Orange: it was yours, was it not? Well! instead of camping with you in front of Antwerp, it is in Antwerp, which is very different. See the Silent, as you yourself call him: he was your friend and counsellor; not only do you not know what has become of this counsellor, but you seem to be sure that the friend has changed to an enemy. See the Flemish: on seeing you arrive in Flanders, they decked their boats and their walls. Now they close their doors at sight of you and level their cannon at your approach, neither more nor less than if you were the Duc d'Alba. Well! I tell you, Flemish and Hollanders, Antwerp

and Orange, are waiting only for a chance to combine against you, and this will come the moment you cry 'fire' to your chief of artillery."

"Well," replied the Duc d'Anjou, "at one blow we will defeat Antwerp and Orange, Flemish and Hollanders."

"No, monseigneur, because we have just enough men to make an assault on Antwerp, supposing that we have but to deal with the Antwerpers, and while we are attacking, the Silent, without saying a word, will fall on us, with his eternal eight or ten thousand men, always destroyed and always recovered, by the aid of which for ten or twelve years he has held in check the Duc d'Alba, Don Juan Requesens, and the Duc de Parma."

"So you persist in your opinion?"

"Which one?"

"That we shall be defeated."

"Infallibly."

"Well, it will be easy to escape, on your part, at least, Monsieur de Joyeuse," continued the prince, bitterly. "My brother sent you to me to help me; your responsibility will be safe if I dismiss you by telling you that I think I do not need to be aided."

"Your highness may dismiss me," said Joyeuse; "but on the eve of a battle, it would be a disgrace for me to accept your dismissal."

A long murmur of approbation followed the words of Joyeuse; the prince saw that he had gone too far.

"My dear admiral," said he, rising and embracing the young man, "you are not willing to understand me. It seems to me, however, that I am right, or rather that in my present position I cannot admit aloud that I have been wrong; you reproach me for my mistakes; I know them. I have been too jealous of the honor of my name; I have been too anxious to prove the superiority of the French arms, therefore I am wrong. But the evil is done, would you commit a worse one? Here we are before armed men, that is, before men who refuse us what they once offered me. Would you have me give in to them? In that case, they would soon take piece by piece that which I have won; no, the sword is drawn, let us strike, or we shall be struck; that is my idea."

"From the instant your highness speaks in that way," said Joyeuse, "I will refrain from adding a single word; I am

here to obey you, monseigneur, and as gladly, believe me, if you lead me to death as if you lead me to victory; and yet — but no, monseigneur."

"What?"

"No; I must and will be silent."

"No, for God's sake, speak, admiral; speak, I wish it!"

"Then in private, monseigneur."

"In private?"

"Yes, if it pleases your highness."

Every one arose and withdrew to the end of the spacious tent of Francis.

"Speak," said the latter.

"Monseigneur may take a repulse inflicted by Spain indifferently, a check which would make these Flemish beer drinkers triumphant, or this double-faced Prince of Orange; but could you accommodate yourself so easily to being laughed at by Monsieur le Duc de Guise?"

Francis frowned.

"Monsieur de Guise," said he, "why, what has he to do with all this?"

"Monsieur de Guise," continued Joyeuse, "has attempted, they say, to assassinate monseigneur. If Salcède did not confess it on the scaffold, he confessed it on the rack. Now, it is a great pleasure to offer to the Lorraine, who plays an important part in all this, or I am greatly mistaken, the fact of our being defeated at Antwerp, and to procure for him, who knows? without untying a purse, the death of a son of France, whom he had promised to pay so dearly to Salcède. Read the history of Flanders, monseigneur, and you will see that the Flemish are accustomed to fatten their lands with the blood of the most illustrious princes and the best French chevaliers."

The duke shook his head.

"Well! be it so, Joyeuse," said he, "if necessary, I will give the cursed Lorraine the joy of seeing me killed, but I will not give him that of seeing me retreat. I am thirsty for glory, Joyeuse, for I am the only one of my name, and still I have battles to win."

"And Cateau Cambrésis, which you forget, monseigneur? It is true that you are the only one."

"Compare that skirmish to Jarnac and Moncontour, Joyeuse, and estimate how much I owe my well-loved brother,

Henry. No, no," he added, "I am not a petty king of Navarre; I am a French prince."

Then turning to the gentlemen who, at the words of Joyeuse, had withdrawn:

"Gentlemen," said he, "the assault still holds good; the rain has stopped, the land is dry; we will attack to-night."

Joyeuse bowed.

"Will monseigneur kindly give his orders," said he; "we are waiting for them."

"You have eight vessels, without counting the admiral's galley, have you not, Monsieur de Joyeuse?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You will force the line, and this will be easy, as the Antwerpers have in port only some merchant vessels; then you will bring your broadsides to bear upon the quay. From there, if the quay is defended, you will storm the city and attempt to land with your fifteen hundred men. From the rest of the army I will make two columns, one commanded by the Count de Saint Aignan, the other by myself. Both will attempt the escalade by surprise the moment the first shots of the cannon are heard. The cavalry will remain in reserve, in case of a repulse, to protect the retreat of the column which is driven back. Of these three attacks one will certainly succeed. The first corps reaching the rampart will fire a fusee to rally to it the other corps."

"But it is necessary to foresee everything, monseigneur," said Joyeuse. "Suppose that which you think impossible, namely, that the three columns of attack are all three repulsed?"

"In that case, we will gain the ships under the protection of the fire from our batteries, and we will spread ourselves in the polders, where the Antwerpers will not venture to follow us."

They bowed in sign of compliance.

"Now, gentlemen," said the duke, "silence. Let the sleeping troops be wakened, and let them embark with order; no firing, not a musket-shot must reveal our plan. You, admiral, will be at the port before the Antwerpers will have suspected your departure. We are going to cross the river and follow the left bank, and will arrive at the same time as you. Go now, gentlemen, and good courage. The luck which has followed us till now will not fear to cross the Scheldt with us."

The officers left the prince's tent and gave their orders with the precautions that had been advised.

Soon all this human swarm began to give out its confused murmuring; but one would have thought it was that of the wind playing among the gigantic reeds and the thick grasses of the polders.

The admiral returned to his galley.

CHAPTER LXV.

MONSEIGNEUR.

The Antwerpers, however, did not see with complacency the hostile preparations of Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, and Joyeuse was not mistaken in attributing to them all possible ill will.

Antwerp was like a bee-hive which at night is calm and deserted on the outside, but within, full of noise and movement.

The Flemish, who were armed, patrolled the streets, barricaded their houses, doubled the chains, and fraternized with the battalions of the Prince of Orange, a part of which were already in garrison at Antwerp, and the other part of which were returning in companies, which as soon as they had entered, scattered themselves in the city.

When everything was ready for a vigorous defence, the Prince of Orange, on a dark and moonless night, entered the town without any manifestation, but with the calmness and the firmness which were apparent in the carrying out of all his resolutions when these resolutions were once taken.

He went to the Hôtel de Ville, where his friends had made everything ready for his arrival. There he received all the aldermen and centeniers of the bourgeoisie, reviewed the officers of the paid troops, and finally received the principal officers, whom he informed concerning his plans. Among his projects, the most important was to profit by the manifestation of the Duc d'Anjou against the city to break with him. The Duc d'Anjou had reached the point to which the Silent had wished to bring him, and it was with delight that the latter saw this new competitor for the sovereign power ruining himself like the others.

The same evening on which the Duc d'Anjou was preparing to attack, the Prince of Orange, as we have said, who had been in the city for two days, held a council with the commandant of the place for the bourgeois.

At each objection offered by the governor to the plan of defence of the Prince of Orange, if the objection were such as might cause any delay in the plans, the Prince of Orange shook his head like a man surprised at this uncertainty.

But at every shake of the head the commandant of the place replied:

"Prince, you know that it is a settled thing that monseigneur should come; let us therefore wait for monseigneur."

This magical word made the Silent frown; but although he frowned and bit his nails with impatience, he waited. Then each one fixed his eyes on a large clock that ticked loudly, and seemed to be asking the pendulum to hasten the coming of the personage so impatiently expected.

Nine o'clock at night sounded: the uncertainty became real anxiety; some scouts pretended to have seen a movement in the French camp.

A small flat boat, like the basin of a pair of scales, had been despatched across the Scheldt; the Antwerpers, still less anxious at what was taking place on the land-side than that which was taking place on the water-side, had wished to have news of the French flotilla; the small boat had not returned.

The Prince of Orange arose and biting his buff gloves in anger, said to the Antwerpers:

"Monseigneur is making us wait so long, gentlemen, that Antwerp will be taken and burned by the time he arrives; the city, therefore, can judge of the difference which exists on this point between the French and the Spanish."

These words were not spoken to reassure the civil authorities, and they looked at one another with great emotion.

At that moment a spy, who had been sent along the road to Molines, and who had ridden as far as Saint Nicholas, returned and announced that he had neither heard nor seen anything which in the least announced the arrival of the personage for whom they were waiting.

"Gentlemen," cried the Silent at this news, "you see we are waiting in vain; let us arrange our own affairs; time presses, and the country is in no way protected. It is well to have confidence in superior abilities; but you see that above

all, it is on ourselves we must rely. Let us therefore deliberate, gentlemen."

He had scarcely finished speaking before the door of the room opened, and a valet appeared and pronounced the one word which at such a moment seemed to be worth a thousand others:

"Monseigneur!"

In the man's tone, in the joy he could not keep from showing in performing his duty as usher, one could read the enthusiasm of the people, and all their confidence in the one whom they called by this vague and respectful name:

"Monseigneur!"

Scarcely had the sound of this voice, trembling with emotion, died away when a tall, imperious-looking man, wearing with infinite grace the cloak which completely enveloped him, entered the room, and courteously saluted those who were there.

But at the first glance his proud and piercing eye perceived the prince in the midst of his officers. He walked straight to him and held out his hand. The prince pressed it affectionately, and almost respectfully. They called each other monseigneur.

After this brief exchange of civilities the stranger removed his cloak.

He was dressed in a buff doublet, and wore cloth hose and long leather boots.

He was armed with a long sword which seemed to form a part, not of his costume, but of his limbs, so easily did it swing at his side; a small dagger was passed through his belt, near a pouch filled with papers.

As he threw aside his cloak they could see that the long boots, of which we have spoken, were greatly soiled from dust and mud.

At every step he took on the flag-stones, his spurs, red with the blood of his horse, gave out a sinister sound.

He seated himself at the council table.

"Well! where are we, monseigneur?" he demanded.

"Monseigneur," replied the Silent, "in coming hither you must have seen that the streets were barricaded."

"I saw that."

"And the houses turned into battlements," added an officer.

"As to that, I could not see it; but it is a wise precaution."

"And the chains doubled," said a third.

"Good," replied the stranger, carelessly.

"Monseigneur does not approve of these preparations of defence?" asked a voice with an evident accent of anxiety and disappointment.

"Yes," said the stranger, "and yet I do not think in our present circumstances that they are very useful; they weary the soldier and alarm the bourgeois. You have a plan of attack and defence, I presume?"

"We were waiting for monseigneur in order to tell it to him," replied the burgomaster.

"Speak, gentlemen, speak."

"Monseigneur arrived a little late," added the prince, "and in the meantime I had to act."

"And you did well, monseigneur; moreover, we know that when you act, you act well. Nor did I, believe me, lose time on the way."

Then turning to the bourgeois:

"We know through our spies," said the burgomaster, "that a movement is in preparation in the camp of the French; they are making ready for an attack; but as we do not know from which side the attack will take place, we have disposed the cannon so that it may be divided evenly the entire length of the rampart."

"That is wise," replied the stranger, with a slight smile, glancing cautiously at the prince, who was silent, letting all the bourgeois talk war to him, a soldier.

"It is the same with our civic troops," continued the burgomaster; "they are spread in double posts along the whole length of the walls, and have orders to run instantly to the point of attack."

The stranger said nothing; he seemed waiting for the Prince of Orange to speak.

"However," continued the burgomaster, "the opinion of the greatest number of the council is that it seems impossible that the French are planning anything but a feint."

"And with what object, this feint?" asked the stranger.

"In order to intimidate us and bring us to a friendly settlement which will deliver the city to the French."

The stranger again glanced at the Prince of Orange.

One would have said that he was ignorant of everything that was taking place, and listened to every word with an indifference which bordered on disdain.

"And yet," said an anxious voice, "this evening we thought we noticed preparations for an attack going on within the camp."

"Suspicions without foundation," said the burgomaster. "I myself examined the camp with an excellent field-glass from Strasbourg; the cannon seemed nailed to the ground, the men were preparing to sleep without any anxiety, and Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou was giving a dinner in his tent."

The stranger glanced again at the Prince of Orange. This time it seemed to him that a slight smile curled the lips of the Silent, while by a scarcely perceptible movement a scornful shrug of his shoulders accompanied the smile.

"Well! gentlemen," said the stranger, "you are completely mistaken; it is not a furtive attack they are preparing at present, it is a real and genuine assault you will have to sustain."

"Really?"

"Your plans, natural as they appear, are incomplete."

"And yet, monsieur," — said the bourgeois, humiliated that he seemed to doubt their knowledge of strategy.

"Incomplete," resumed the stranger, "in this, that you are expecting an attack, and have taken every precaution against such an event."

"Without doubt."

"Well! this attack, gentlemen, if you will believe me"—

"Finish, monseigneur."

"You need not expect, but you must give."

"Good!" cried the Prince of Orange, "this is talking!"

"At this very moment," continued the stranger, who understood from that instant that he had found a support in the prince, "the vessels of Monsieur de Joyeuse are getting under sail."

"How do you know that, monseigneur?" cried the burgomaster and the other members of the council in the same breath.

"I know it," said the stranger.

A murmur of doubt passed like a breeze through the assembly; but light as it was, it touched the ears of the clever warrior who had just been introduced upon the scene, to play there, in all probability, the principal rôle.

"Do you doubt it?" he asked with the greatest calm, and like a man accustomed to fight against all apprehension, all pride, and all bourgeois prejudices.

"We do not doubt it, since you say so, monseigneur. But, nevertheless, your highness will permit us to state" —

"Yes?"

"That if it were so" —

"Well?"

"We should hear of it."

"From whom?"

"From our marine spy."

PART III.

CHAPTER LXVI.

MONSEIGNEUR.

(Continued.)

Just then the usher admitted a man who entered the room with a heavy step, and advanced with respect now toward the burgomaster, now toward the Prince of Orange.

"Ah! ah!" said the burgomaster; "is it you, my friend?"

"I myself, Monsieur le Burgomaster," replied the newcomer.

"Monseigneur," said the burgomaster, "this is the man we sent as spy."

At this word "monseigneur," which was not addressed to the Prince of Orange, the spy made a gesture of surprise and delight, and advanced hastily, the better to see the one designated by that title.

The newcomer was one of those Flemish sailors whose type is easily recognizable, in that it is so marked: the square head, blue eyes, short neck, and broad shoulders. He entered, twisting his damp woollen cap between his heavy hands, and as he crossed the room he left behind him a wide track of water.

His heavy garments were literally soaked, and gave out an unpleasant moist odor.

"Ah! here is a brave fellow just returned from swimming," said the stranger, looking at the sailor with his usual air of authority, which at once impressed soldier and servant, because it implied strength and kindness.

"Yes, monseigneur, yes," said the sailor, with alacrity; "and the Scheldt is both wide and rapid, monseigneur."

"Speak, Goes, speak!" continued the stranger, well knowing the price of the favor he was bestowing on a simple sailor in calling him by name.

So, from that moment, the stranger seemed to exist for Goes alone. Although sent by another, to whom perhaps he should have given an account of his mission, Goes addressed himself to the stranger.

"Monseigneur," said he, "I set out in my small boat. By means of the password I was able to cross the *barrage* we made across the Scheldt with our boats, and pushed on as far as those damned Frenchmen. Ah! pardon me, monseigneur."

Goes stopped.

"Go on, go on," said the stranger, smiling, "I am only half French, and consequently I shall be only half damned."

"Well, then, monseigneur, — since monseigneur is good enough to pardon me" —

The stranger nodded. Goes continued.

"During the night, while I was rowing with my oars wrapped in linen, I heard a voice cry out: 'Boat ahoy! what do you want?'

"I supposed the words were addressed to me, and I was about to give some answer or other, when I heard behind me the cry of 'Admiral's boat.'"

The stranger looked at the officers with a nod of the head which meant:

"What did I tell you?"

"At the same instant," continued Goes, "and as I began to tack, I felt a terrible shock, my boat was overturned; the water covered my head, I rolled into a bottomless abyss; but the whirlpools of the Scheldt recognized me as an old acquaintance, and I again saw the light. It was simply the admiral's boat, which, in taking Monsieur de Joyeuse on board, had passed over me. God alone knows why I was not crushed or drowned!"

"Thanks, brave Goes, thanks," said the Prince of Orange, glad to see that his anticipations had been realized, "go now, and keep silent."

And extending his arm he laid a purse in Goes' hand. The sailor, however, still seemed to be waiting for something; it was his dismissal from the stranger.

The latter made a kindly motion of his hand, and Goes withdrew, apparently more satisfied with this sign than he had been with the gift from the Prince of Orange.

"Well!" said the stranger to the burgomaster, "what do you say to this report? Do you still doubt that the French

are getting under sail, and do you think that it was in order to pass the night on board that Monsieur de Joyeuse repaired from camp to the admiral's galley ?"

"But you predict, then, monseigneur ?" said the bourgeois.

"No more than monseigneur the Prince of Orange, who in all things is of my opinion, I am sure. But, like his highness, I am well informed, and above all, I know those who are on the other side."

And his hand indicated the polders.[1]

"So that," he continued, "it would surprise me greatly if they did not attack to-night. Therefore hold yourselves ready, gentlemen ; for, if you give them time, they will attack in good earnest."

"These gentlemen will do me the justice to acknowledge that before your arrival, monseigneur, I addressed the same words to them."

"But," demanded the burgomaster, "why does monseigneur think that the French will attack ?"

"These are the probabilities : The infantry is Catholic, it will fight alone ; that means it will attack on one side. The cavalry is Calvinist, and it will fight alone. Two sides. The naval forces belong to Monsieur de Joyeuse, who comes from Paris. The court knows with what object he left ; he will wish to have his share of fighting and glory. Three sides.

"Let us make three companies, then," said the burgomaster.

"Make one, gentlemen, a single one, with all that you have in the way of the best soldiers, and leave those about whom there is any doubt in open country to guard your walls ; then make a vigorous sortie with this company when the French are least expecting it. They plan an attack ; let them be forestalled and attacked themselves ; if you wait for an assault from them, you are lost ; for in an assault the French have no equal, as you gentlemen have no equal, when, in open country, you defend the approach to your towns."

The faces of the Flemish shone.

"What did I say, gentlemen ?" said the Silent.

"It is a great honor for me," said the stranger, "to have been unconsciously of the same opinion as the foremost captain of the century."

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[1] Tracts of low land in Holland and Belgium reclaimed from the sea by means of high embankments. — *Tr.*

Both bowed courteously.

"So," continued the stranger, "the affair is settled: you will make a furious sortie on infantry and cavalry. I hope your officers will lead this sortie in such a way as to repulse the besiegers."

"But their vessels, their vessels," said the burgomaster; "they will force our barriers, and as the wind is northwest they will be in the heart of the city in two hours."

"You yourselves have six old vessels and thirty barks at Sainte Marie, that is, one league from here, have you not? That is your maritime barricade, your chain closing the Scheldt."

"Yes, monseigneur, it is just that. How do you know all these details?"

The stranger smiled.

"I know them, as you see," said he; "it is there that the issue of the battle lies."

"Then," said the burgomaster, "we must send reinforcements to our brave sailors."

"On the contrary, you can still dispose of the four hundred men who were there; twenty intelligent, brave, and devoted soldiers will suffice."

The Antwerpers opened their eyes wide.

"Do you wish," said the stranger, "to destroy the whole of the French fleet at the expense of your six old vessels and your thirty old boats?"

"Humph!" said the Antwerpers, looking at one another, "neither our vessels nor our boats are very old."

"Well! put a price on them," said the stranger, "and we will pay your price."

"There," said the Silent in a low voice to the stranger, "there are the men against whom I have to struggle daily. Oh! were it circumstances alone I had to fight against, I should already have conquered."

"Come, gentlemen," said the stranger, carrying his hand to his well-filled purse, "as we have said, give us a price, but do so quickly; you shall be paid in drafts on yourselves. I trust you will find them good."

"Monseigneur," said the burgomaster, after an instant's consultation with the aldermen, the tithing-men, and the centurions, "we are merchants and not lords; therefore you must pardon us for a certain hesitation, for our souls, you see, are

not in our bodies, but on our counters. However, there are certain circumstances in which, for the general good, we know how to make sacrifices. Dispose of our vessels, therefore, as you intend to do."

"Faith, monseigneur," said the Silent, "it is your affair. It would have taken me six months to obtain what you have accomplished in ten minutes."

"I will dispose, therefore, of your barrier, gentlemen, but in the following manner: The French, with the admiral's galley at their head, will attempt to force the passage. I will double the chains of the barrier by having them long enough for the fleet to find itself in the midst of your boats and vessels. Then from your boats and vessels the twenty brave men I have left there will throw grappling-irons, and this done they will escape in a boat after setting fire to your vessels, which are loaded with inflammable materials."

"And you intend," cried the Silent, "that the French fleet shall be entirely burned."

"Yes, entirely," said the stranger; "then, no retreat by sea, no retreat across the polders, for you will open the sluices at Malines, Berchem, Lier, Duffel, and Antwerp. Repulsed, first by you, pursued by your broken dykes, surrounded on all sides by the unexpected and ever-rising sea, the sea which will have but a flow and no ebb, the French will all be drowned, engulfed, annihilated."

The officers gave a cry of joy.

"There is one obstacle," said the prince.

"What one, monseigneur?" asked the stranger.

"This: it will take a whole day to despatch the various orders to the different towns, and we have only an hour."

"An hour will suffice," replied the one called monseigneur.

"But who will inform the flotilla?"

"It has already been informed."

"By whom?"

"By me. If these gentlemen had refused to give me the flotilla I would have bought it of them."

"But Malines, Lier, Duffel?"

"I passed through Malines and Lier, and I sent an agent to Duffel. At eleven o'clock the French will be beaten; at midnight the fleet will be burned; at one o'clock the French will be in full retreat; at two o'clock Malines will break the dikes, Lier will open its sluices, Duffel will turn its canals from their

beds, and the entire plain will become a furious ocean, which will ruin our homes, our fields, our woods, and our villages, it is true, but which, at the same time, I repeat, will destroy the French, and in such a way that not a single one will return to France."

A silence indicative of admiration and almost of fear followed these words; then suddenly the Flemish burst into applause. The Prince of Orange advanced toward the stranger and held out his hand to him.

"So, monseigneur, everything is ready on our side?"

"Everything," replied the stranger, "and, moreover, I think that everything is ready with the French," and he pointed to an officer who was raising the portière.

"Monseigneur and gentlemen," said the officer, "we have received word that the French are marching toward the city."

"To arms!" cried the burgomaster.

"To arms!" repeated the assistants.

"One instant, gentlemen," interrupted the stranger, with his strong, commanding voice, "you forget that I must give you a final suggestion, more important than all the others."

"Give it! Give it!" cried the voices.

"The French are to be surprised, so it will not even be a combat, not even a retreat, but a flight; to follow them we must be unencumbered. Off with your cuirasses, by Heaven! It is your cuirasses, in which you cannot move, which have been the cause of your losing every battle in which you have been defeated. Down with your cuirasses, gentlemen, down with your cuirasses!"

And the stranger showed his broad chest protected simply by a buff coat.

"We shall meet again in the fight, gentlemen," continued the stranger to the captains; "in the meantime go to the square of the Hôtel de Ville, where you will find all your men ready for battle. We will join you there."

"Thanks, monseigneur," said the prince to the stranger, "you have saved both Belgium and Holland."

"Prince, you overwhelm me," replied the latter.

"Will your highness consent to draw swords against the French?" asked the prince.

"I shall arrange so as to fight opposite the Huguenots," replied the stranger, bowing with a smile which his sombre companion might have envied him, and which God alone understood.

CHAPTER LXVII.

FRENCH AND FLEMISH.

Just as the council was leaving the city, and the officers were about to place themselves at the head of their men and to execute the orders of the unknown chief who seemed sent to the Flemish by Providence itself, a protracted noise which seemed to envelop the entire city was heard, followed by a great shout.

At the same time the artillery sounded.

This artillery surprised the French in the midst of their night march and just as they thought that they themselves were about to surprise the sleeping city. But instead of delaying their march it hastened it. If they could not take the city by surprise by means of scaling-ladders, as they called them in those days, they could, as we saw the King of Navarre do at Cahors, fill the ditch with fascines and blow up the gates with petards. The cannon of the ramparts continued to fire, but at night its effect was almost lost; after having responded by shouts to the shouts of their enemies, the French advanced in silence toward the rampart with the impetuous intrepidity which is habitual with them in an attack.

Suddenly gates and posterns opened and from all sides armed men rushed forth; it was not the ardent impetuousness of the French which animated them, it was a sort of heavy intoxication which did not prevent the movement of the soldier, but which rendered him as massive as a rolling wall.

The Flemish advanced in close ranks, in compact groups, above which an artillery more noisy than formidable continued to thunder.

It was a hand to hand encounter: the sword and the knife clashed; the pike and the sword crossed; pistol shots and the firing of musketry lighted the faces made red by blood.

Not a cry, not a murmur, not a complaint; the Flemish fought with rage, the French with spite. The Flemish were furious at having to fight, for they fight neither from nature nor from pleasure. The French were furious at having been attacked when they were about to attack.

They were fighting hand to hand with the blind fury which we cannot attempt to describe, when the booming of cannon

was heard from the direction of Sainte Marie, and a light rose about the city like a plume of flame.

It was Joyeuse making an attack, and causing a diversion by forcing the barrier which protected the Scheldt. He was about to penetrate with his fleet into the heart of the city.

At least, that is what the French hoped.

But it was not so.

Driven by a west wind, that is, by the one which is most favorable to such an undertaking, Joyeuse had weighed anchor, and, the admiral's galley at the head, he had taken advantage of the breeze which drove him on in spite of the current. Everything was ready for the fight; his sailors, armed with their boarding-swords, were at the rear; his gunners, with lighted matches, were near their pieces; his top-men with grenades; finally his picked sailors, armed with hatchets, held themselves in readiness to spring on the ships and boats of the enemy, and to break down chains and cords in order to make a pathway for the fleet.

They advanced in silence. The seven ships of Joyeuse, disposed in the shape of a wedge, of which the admiral's galley formed the most acute angle, seemed like a troop of gigantic phantoms gliding over the surface of the water. The young man, whose post was on the quarter-deck, could not remain there. Clad in magnificent armor, he had taken the place of the first lieutenant on the galley, and bending over the bowsprit, he seemed trying to pierce the fog of the river and the gloom of the night.

Before long he saw the dike appearing in the darkness, extending gloomily across the river; it seemed lonely and deserted. But in that country of ambush there was something alarming in this loneliness and solitude; they still advanced, however; they were in sight of the barrier, scarcely ten cables' lengths from it, and each second they were coming nearer, without a single "Who goes there?" having fallen on their ears.

The sailors saw in this silence nothing but a negligence on the part of the enemy, which pleased them; the young admiral, more far-seeing, surmised some treachery, which alarmed him.

At last the prow of the admiral's galley fixed itself in the rigging of the two ships which formed the centre of the barrier, and driving them before her, she turned the whole of the

flexible dike, the compartments of which were held together by chains, and which, yielding without breaking, were brought alongside of the French ships, assuming the same form as they themselves.

Suddenly, as the hatchet-bearers were receiving the order to descend and break the barrier, a shower of grapnel-irons, hurled by invisible hands, seized hold of the rigging of the French vessels.

The Flemish had forestalled the manœuvre of the French by doing what the latter were about to do.

Joyeuse thought that his enemies were offering him battle. He accepted it. The grapnel-hooks thrown from his side bound the ships of the enemy to his own by iron knots. Seizing a hatchet from the hands of a sailor, he was the first to rush upon the ship which was held in close embrace, and shouted:

"On board! On board!"

His entire crew followed him, officers and sailors, uttering the same cry as himself; but no shout answered his, no forces opposed him. All that he saw was three boats, filled with men, gliding silently down the river, like three belated sea-birds.

These boats, driven along by means of oars, disappeared like birds at a single flight.

The assailants stood motionless on the ships they had just boarded without a struggle.

It was the same along the entire line.

All at once Joyeuse heard a dull rumbling under his feet, and an odor of sulphur filled the air.

A thought flashed through his mind; he ran to a hatchway and raised it; the inside of the ship was on fire.

At the same instant the cry, "To the ships! To the ships!" resounded along the entire line.

Each one rushed back in greater haste than he had left. Joyeuse, the first to come down, was the last to return. Just as he reached the side of his galley, the fire lighted up the deck of the vessel he had left.

Then the flames shot forth as from twenty volcanoes: every boat, every sloop, every vessel was a crater. The French fleet, of a much greater tonnage, seemed to dominate an abyss of fire.

The order had been given to cut the ropes, to break the

chains, to unfasten the grapnel-hooks; the sailors rushed into the rigging with the swiftness of men convinced that their safety depended on their swiftness. But the work was enormous. Perhaps they might have cut away the grapnel-hooks which had been thrown by the enemy on to the French fleet, but there were still those hurled by the French fleet on to the vessels of their enemies. Suddenly twenty explosions were heard; the French ships trembled from bow to stern, groaning from their very depths.

It was the guns which protected the dyke, and which, loaded to the mouth and abandoned by the Antwerpers, were volleying forth of their own accord and in proportion as the flames reached them, destroying without discrimination everything in their pathway.

The flames rose like gigantic serpents to the top of the masts, rolled around the yards, and with their forked tongues licked the copper-colored sides of the French ships.

Joyeuse, in his magnificent armor inlaid with gold, gave his orders in a calm and imperious voice in the midst of all the flames, resembling one of those fabulous Salamanders, with the thousand scales, which, at every movement, shook off a shower of sparks.

But soon the explosions increased, stronger and more terrible; it was no longer the cannon which were thundering, it was the powder-magazines which were catching on fire, it was the ships themselves which were exploding.

As long as he had hoped to break the mortal bands which tied him to his enemies, Joyeuse had fought, but there was no further hope of succeeding; the flames had reached the French vessels, and as each ship of the enemy blew up, a shower of sparks fell upon his deck like a cluster of fire-works.

The fire was Greek fire, that implacable flame which feeds on that which extinguishes other fires and which devours its prey to the very edge of the water.

The Antwerp ships, in bursting, had broken down the dykes; but the French vessels, instead of continuing on their way, began to drift, dragging after them, as they burned, some fragments of the consuming firebrand which had embraced them in its flaming arms.

Joyeuse understood that no further struggle was possible; he gave orders to lower the boats and to land on the left bank.

The order was transmitted to the other boats by the aid of speaking-trumpets; those who did not hear it, instinctively carried out the same idea.

The entire crew, to the last sailor, embarked before Joyeuse left the deck of his galley.

His coolness seemed to have brought back coolness to every one; each of his sailors carried a hatchet and boarding-sword.

Before he had reached the bank of the river, the admiral's galley blew up, lighting up on one side the silhouette of the city, and on the other the long horizon of the river, which flowed on, ever winding, until it was lost in the sea.

In the meantime the artillery on the ramparts had ceased its firing, not that the fighting had lessened in fury, but, on the contrary, because the Flemish and the French, having come to the point of fighting hand to hand, could not fire on one without hitting the other.

The Calvinist cavalry had charged in turn, doing wonders. Before their onset a path was made under the very feet of the horses, but the wounded Flemish ripped open the animals with their broad knives.

In spite of this brilliant cavalry charge, some disorder arose in the French ranks, and they could merely stand still instead of advancing, while the gates of the city constantly poured forth fresh battalions, which rushed upon the army of the Duc d'Anjou.

Suddenly a great rumble was heard almost beneath the walls of the city. The cries, "Anjou, Anjou! France, France!" rose among the ranks of the Antwerpers and a frightful shudder shook the whole mass, so closed in by the simple impulse of those who drove it that the foremost were brave because they could not be otherwise.

This movement was caused by Joyeuse; the shouts were given by the sailors, fifteen hundred men, who, armed with hatchets and knives, and led by Joyeuse, to whom some one had brought a riderless horse, at once fell on the Flemish. They had to avenge their burning fleet and two hundred of their companions who had been burned or drowned.

They did not choose their rank in battle, but they rushed upon the first group which, from its language and costume, they recognized as the enemy.

No one handled a long sword better than Joyeuse; his wrist turned like a steel wheel, and every blow with the edge

of the sword cut open a head, every thrust with its point made a hole in a man.

The group of Flemish on whom Joyeuse fell was devoured like a grain of wheat by a legion of locusts.

Intoxicated by this first success, the soldiers pushed forward. While they gained ground, the Calvinist cavalry, surrounded by these crowds of men, lost it little by little; but the infantry of the Count of Saint Aignan managed to fight hand to hand with the Flemish.

The prince had seen the burning of the fleet in the distance; he had heard the thundering of the cannon and the explosion of the ships without suspecting anything beyond a fierce combat which on that side would naturally terminate in a victory for Joyeuse. The idea of supposing that a few Flemish vessels would fight against a French fleet! Therefore, he was expecting every minute a diversion on the part of Joyeuse, when suddenly he was told that the fleet was destroyed and that Joyeuse and his sailors were fighting in the midst of the Flemish.

Immediately the prince began to feel anxious; the fleet was the reserve and consequently the safety of the army.

The duke sent orders to the Calvinist cavalry to attempt a fresh charge, and exhausted riders and horsemen rallied to rush again upon the Antwerpers.

The voice of Joyeuse was heard shouting in the midst of the confusion:

"Stand firm, Monsieur de Saint Aignan! France, France!"

And like a reaper mowing down a field of wheat, his sword swung in the air and laid at his feet a harvest of men. The weak favorite, the delicate sybarite, seemed with his cuirass to have put on the fabulous strength of the Nemæan Hercules.

The infantry, hearing the voice that gave that shout and seeing that sword gleam in the darkness, again took heart and, the like the cavalry, made a fresh effort and returned to the fight.

But about that time the man whom they called monseigneur left the city on a beautiful black horse. He wore black armor, that is, a helmet, armlets, cuirass, and thigh pieces of burnished steel. He was followed by five hundred well-mounted horsemen whom the Prince of Orange had put under his command.

On his side, William the Silent, with his picked infantry, who had not yet been in battle, left by the parallel gate.

The cavalier in the black armor hastened to where he was most needed; that was in the spot where Joyeuse and his sailors were fighting.

The Flemish recognized him and separated before him, crying joyfully:

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"

Joyeuse and his sailors felt the enemy giving way; they heard the shouts, and suddenly found themselves face to face with this fresh company, which seemed to appear suddenly before them as by magic.

Joyeuse rode his horse up to the black cavalier. and both met in sombre fury.

At the first clash of their swords, a shower of sparks shot forth. Joyeuse, confident of the temper of his armor and of his knowledge of fencing, dealt some fierce blows which were skilfully parried. At the same time a thrust from his adversary touched him full in the chest, and, gliding over his cuirass, in spite of the armor drew some drops of blood from his shoulder.

"Ah!" cried the young admiral, feeling the point of the iron, "this man is a Frenchman, and more, this man has studied fencing under the same master as myself."

At these words, the stranger was seen to turn and try to throw himself upon another point.

"If you are French," cried Joyeuse to him, "you are a traitor, for you are fighting against your king, your country, and your flag."

The stranger replied merely by turning and attacking Joyeuse with fury.

But this time Joyeuse was forewarned, and knew with what a skilful swordsman he had to deal. He parried three or four blows successively with as much cleverness as rage, with as much strength as anger.

Then it was the stranger who, in turn, made a movement as though to retreat.

"See!" cried the young man, "this is what one does when one fights for one's country; a pure heart and loyal aim are enough to defend a head without a helmet, a brow without a visor."

And tearing away the straps of his helmet, he threw it from him, uncovering his noble and beautiful head, his eyes shining with vigor, pride, and youth.

Instead of answering or following the example given him, the man in the black armor uttered a dull groan and raised his sword over the bare head.

"Ah!" exclaimed Joyeuse, parrying the thrust, "I said truly that you were a traitor, and as traitor you shall die," and he dealt him two or three blows in succession, one of which penetrated an opening of the visor of his helmet.

"Ah! I will kill you," cried the young man; "and I will remove your helmet which protects you and hides you so well, and I will hang you to the first tree I meet on my way."

The stranger was about to reply, when a horseman who had just joined him leaned over and said to him:

"Monseigneur, no more skirmishing; your presence is needed yonder."

The stranger looked in the direction indicated by the speaker's hand and saw the Flemish hesitating before the Calvinist cavalry.

"Yes," said he in a sombre voice, "those are the ones I am looking for."

Just then a troop of horsemen fell upon the sailors of Joyeuse, who, wearied from constant use of their heavy arms, began for the first time to retreat.

The black cavalier took advantage of this movement to disappear in the confusion and darkness.

A quarter of an hour later, the French gave way along the whole line and tried to escape.

Monsieur de Saint Aignan took every measure to obtain from his men a retreat in good order.

But a last troop of five hundred horse and two thousand foot-soldiers came out from the city perfectly fresh, and fell on this army, harassed and already beginning to retreat. These were the old soldiers of the Prince of Orange, who in turn had fought against the Duc d'Alba, Don Juan, Requesens, and Alexander Farnese.

It was then decided to leave the field of battle and retreat by land, since the fleet on which they had counted in case of accident was destroyed.

In spite of the coolness of the chiefs, in spite of the bravery of the greater number, a frightful rout took place.

It was at this moment that the stranger, with all the cavalry, which had scarcely been in the fight, fell on the fugitives and

again came upon Joyeuse, at the rear, and his sailors, two-thirds of whom he had left on the battlefield.

The young admiral was mounted on his third horse, the two others having been killed under him. His sword was broken, but he had snatched from the hands of a wounded sailor one of the heavy boarding-hatchets, which he whirled about his head with the same ease as though it were a sling in the hands of a slinger.

From time to time he turned about, like those wild boars which cannot make up their minds to flee, and which return desperately upon the hunter.

On their side, the Flemish, who, according to the advice of the one they had called monseigneur, had fought without cuirasses, were quick to pursue and did not give a second's respite to the Angevine army.

Something like remorse, or at least hesitation, seized the heart of the stranger in the face of this great disaster.

"Enough, gentlemen, enough," said he, in French, to his soldiers, "they have been chased to-night from Antwerp, and in eight days they will be driven out of Flanders; let us not ask more from the god of war."

"Ah! you are a Frenchman! you are a Frenchman; I guessed you were, traitor. Ah! may you be d——, and die the death of traitors!"

This furious imprecation seemed to discourage the man whom a thousand swords raised against him had not discouraged. He turned, and conqueror though he was, fled almost as hurriedly as the conquered.

But this retreat of a single man changed nothing on the face of things; fear is contageous; it had gained the entire army, and under the weight of that mad pain, the soldiers began to run like madmen.

The horses grew animated in spite of fatigue, for they themselves seemed under the influence of fear; the men scattered to find shelter. In a few hours the army no longer existed as an army.

It was time, according to the orders of monseigneur, for the dykes to be opened and the sluices to be raised. From Lier to Termonde, from Haesdonk to Malines, every little river swollen by its tributaries, every overflowing canal, sent across the flat country its contingent of furious water. So, when the retreating French, having outrun their enemies, began

to halt; when they had seen the Antwerpers return at last to their city, followed by the soldiers of the Prince of Orange; when those who had escaped safe and sound from the carnage of the night began to think they would at last be saved, and breathed again for an instant, some with a prayer, others with a curse, — then it was that a new enemy, blind and pitiless, was let loose upon them with the speed of the wind, with the impetuosity of the sea; yet in spite of the imminence of the danger which was beginning to surround them, the fugitives suspected nothing.

Joyeuse had commanded his sailors, reduced to eight hundred, to halt. They were the only ones who had preserved any sort of order in the frighful rout.

The count of Saint Aignan, breathless, voiceless, speaking only by his threatening gestures, strove to rally his scattered foot-soldiers.

The Duc d'Anjou, at the head of the fugitives, mounted on a fine horse, and accompanied by a servant leading another horse by the bridle, pushed forward without apparently thinking of anything.

"The wretch has no heart," said some.

"The brave man is magnificent in his coolness," said others.

A few hours of rest snatched between two and six o'clock in the morning gave the foot-soldiers strength to continue the retreat.

But food was lacking.

As to the horses, they seemed more weary than the men, and could scarcely drag themselves along, for they had not eaten since the previous evening. They followed at the rear of the army.

The men hoped to reach Brussels, which belonged to the duke, and where they had many partisans; and yet they were not without anxiety as to its good will. For an instant, too, they had thought themselves able to count on Antwerp, as they now believed they could count on Brussels.

There, at Brussels, scarcely eight leagues from where they were, they could provision the troops, and take an advantageous position in order to recommence the interrupted campaign when they should think it desirable. The remnants which they picked up would serve as a nucleus for a new army.

But even at that hour no one foresaw the frightful moment when the earth was to slip from under the feet of the wretched

soldiers; when mountains of water were to rise, beat them down and roll over their heads; when the remains of so many brave men, carried away by the muddy waters, would roll into the sea, or stop on the way to enrich the countries of Brabant.

Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou had his breakfast served in the hut of a peasant, between Héboken and Heckhout.

The hut was empty, the inhabitants having fled the previous evening; the fire lighted by them at that time still burned on the hearth.

The soldiers and the officers strove to imitate their chief, and scattered through the two towns we have just named; but they saw with surprise mingled with terror that all the houses were deserted and that the inhabitants had carried away almost all the provisions. The count of Saint Aignan, like the others, took his chance.

The indifference of the Duc d'Anjou, at the very hour when so many brave men were dying for him, disgusted him, and he went away from the prince.

He was one of those who said, "The wretch has no heart."

On his own account, he visited two or three houses which he found empty; he knocked at the door of a fourth, when he heard from some of the soldiers that all around for a distance of two miles, that is, in the circle of the country which they occupied, all the houses were vacant.

At this news Monsieur de Saint Aignan scowled and made his usual grimace.

"March on, gentlemen, march on!" said he to his officers.

"But," replied the latter, "we are worn out, and dying of hunger, general."

"Yes; but you are alive, and if you remain here another hour, you will be dead; perhaps it is already too late."

Monsieur de Saint Aignan could tell nothing, but he suspected that some great danger lurked in that solitude.

They broke up camp.

The Duc d'Anjou took the lead, Monsieur de Saint Aignan retained the centre, and Joyeuse took charge of the rear guard. But two or three thousand men, either weakened by their wounds or harassed by fatigue, separated from the others, and lay down in the grass or at the foot of the trees, abandoned, lonely, struck by a sinister presentiment. With them remained the unmounted cavalrymen, those whose horses could

no longer drag themselves along, or who had been wounded on the march. With the Duc d'Anjou there remained scarcely three thousand men strong enough and in any condition to fight.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE TRAVELLERS.

While this disaster, the precursor of a still greater disaster, was taking place, two travellers mounted on excellent horses issued from the gate of Brussels one cool night on their way towards Malines.

They rode side by side, their cloaks tucked up, without visible arms except a large Flemish knife, the brass handle of which shone in the belt of one of them. These travellers rode abreast, each following his own line of thought, possibly the same, without exchanging a single word.

They had the appearance and the costume of those Picardy hawkers, who at that time carried on an active commerce between the kingdoms of France and Flanders, and who were a kind of travelling agents, at once active and simple, who at that period did the work of those of to-day, without suspecting that it was part of the specialty of the great commercial propaganda.

Whoever had seen them riding so quietly along the moonlit road would have taken them for good people hastening to find a bed after a well-spent day.

However, it was merely necessary to hear a few phrases detached from their conversation by the wind, when they carried on any conversation, to rid one's self of this erroneous opinion caused by their appearance.

The strangest of the words exchanged between them was the first one they uttered when they had come to within almost half a mile of Brussels.

"Madame," said the stouter to the slenderer of the two, "you were indeed right to start this evening. We shall make seven miles on this ride, and shall reach Malines, in all probability, just as the results of the attack on Antwerp are known. The people will be thoroughly intoxicated by the triumph. By two days of very short rides, and in order to rest you will need to make short stays, — by two days of short rides we shall

reach Antwerp, and probably at the very hour that the prince will have returned from his joy, when he will deign to look upon the earth after having been raised to the seventh heaven."

The companion whom he called madame was in no wise displeased by this appellation in spite of her man's clothes, and replied in a voice at once calm, grave, and gentle:

"Believe me, my friend, God will grow weary of protecting this wretched prince and will strike him cruelly; let us hasten, therefore, to carry out our projects, for I am not of those who believe in fatality, and I think that men have freedom of will and of action. If we do not act and let God act, it would not have been worth while to have lived so wretchedly until now."

At that moment a breeze from the northwest passed by, piercing and icy.

"You shiver, madame," said the older of the two travellers. "Take your cloak."

"No, Rémy, thank you. You well know that I no longer feel either bodily pain or mental anguish."

Rémy raised his eyes to Heaven and remained plunged in sombre silence.

Occasionally he stopped his horse and turned round in his stirrups, while his companion went on ahead as mute as an equestrian statue.

After one of these momentary halts, when her companion had rejoined her:

"You see no one behind us?" said she.

"No, madame, no one."

"The cavalier who overtook us that night at Valenciennes and who inquired about us after having observed us so long in surprise?"

"I no longer see him."

"But it seems to me that I saw him before entering, monsieur."

"And I, madame, I am sure that I saw him before entering Brussels."

"Brussels, you say?"

"Yes, but he must have stopped in this last city."

"Rémy," said the lady, approaching her companion, as if she feared that some one might overhear her on the deserted road, "Rémy, did it not seem that he resembled" —

"Whom, madame?"

"In figure, at least, for I did not see his face, that unhappy young man?"

"Oh, no, no, madame," Rémy hastened to say. "Not the least in the world. And, besides, how could he have imagined that we had left Paris and were on this road?"

"Why, in the same way that he knew where we were, Rémy, when we changed our home in Paris."

"No, no, madame," said Rémy, "he has neither followed us nor had us followed, and, as I said to you some time ago, I have strong reasons for believing that he has resorted to desperate measures, but in regard to himself alone."

"Alas! Rémy. Every one has his share of suffering in this world. May God lighten that of this poor man!"

Rémy replied by a sigh to the sigh of his mistress and they continued their way without other sound than that made by the foot-falls of the horses on the echoing road.

Two hours passed in that way.

Just as our travellers were about to enter Vilvorde, Rémy turned his head. He had heard the galloping of a horse at the turn of the road. He stopped, listened, but saw nothing.

In vain his eyes strove to pierce the darkness of the night, but as no further sound broke its solemn silence he entered the hamlet with his companion.

"Madame," said he, "daylight will soon be here. If you will trust to me, we shall stop now. The horses are tired, and you need rest."

"Rémy," said the lady, "you know that it is in vain you try to hide from me what you feel. Rémy, you are uneasy."

"Yes, in regard to your health, madame. Believe me, a woman cannot bear such fatigue. I can scarcely do so myself."

"Do as you wish, Rémy," replied the lady.

"Well, then, enter this narrow street, at the end of which I see a lantern dimly shining. That is the sign by which we recognize inns. Hasten, I beg you."

"You heard something, then?"

"Yes; like the step of a horse. It is true that I think I am mistaken, but at all events I will linger behind you an instant to make sure whether my suspicions are true or not."

The lady did not reply, and without trying to turn Rémy

from his intention, put spurs to her horse, which entered the long and winding street.

Rémy let her go on ahead, jumped to the ground, and dropped the bridle of his horse, which naturally followed that of his companion.

As to Rémy, he waited, bending down behind a huge post.

The lady knocked at the door of the inn, behind which, according to the hospitable custom of Flanders, a servant with broad shoulders and strong arms slept.

The woman had already heard the sound of the horse clattering on the pavement of the street, and awakened, without losing her temper. She opened the door, and received the traveller in her arms.

Then she opened, for the two horses, the large arched doors, through which they rushed, recognizing the stable.

"I will wait for my companion," said the lady. "In the meantime, let me sit down by the fire. I will not go to bed until he has come."

The servant threw down some straw for the horses, closed the door of the stable, returned to the kitchen, drew up a stool to the fire, snuffed the thick candle with her fingers, and went to sleep again.

In the meantime, Rémy, who had placed himself in ambush, was watching for the coming of the traveller the galloping of whose horse he had heard.

He saw him enter the hamlet, ride along slowly, listening attentively, then having reached the narrow street he saw the lantern and seemed to hesitate whether to pass by or go on towards it.

He stopped two feet from Rémy, who felt his horse's breath on his shoulder.

Rémy laid his hand on his knife.

"It is indeed he," he murmured, "following us still! What can he want of us?"

The traveller crossed his arms on his breast, while his horse breathed with difficulty, stretching out his neck.

He spoke not a single word, but by the fire in his eye, looking now forward, now backward, now into the narrow street, it was not difficult to guess that he was asking himself whether he should turn back, ride on, or turn towards the inn.

"They have not stopped," said he in a low voice, "I shall ride on."

And giving the reins to his horse he continued his way.

"To-morrow," said Rémy to himself, "we will change our road."

Then he rejoined his companion, who was waiting impatiently.

"Well," said she in a low tone, "is any one following us?"

"No one. I was mistaken. There is no one but ourselves on the road, and you may sleep in all safety."

"Oh, I am not sleepy, Rémy; you know that very well."

"At least you will have supper, madame, for all yesterday you ate nothing."

"Willingly, Rémy."

They awakened the poor servant, who arose a second time with the same good-natured manner as at first, and who, on learning what was wanted, drew from the buffet a quarter of salt pork, a cold hare, and some preserves. Then she brought a pot of Louvain beer, foaming and pearly.

Rémy sat down at the table next to his mistress. The latter half filled a glass with the beer, with which she moistened her lips, broke a piece of bread, a few crumbs of which she ate, and then turned around in her chair, and pushed away glass and bread.

"What! you are not going to eat anything more, my good man?" asked the servant.

"No; I have finished, thank you."

Then the servant looked at Rémy, who took the bread broken by his mistress, ate it slowly, and drank a glass of beer.

"But the meat?" said she. "You do not eat meat, monsieur?"

"No, my child, thank you."

"You do not think it good?"

"I am sure that it is excellent, but I am not hungry."

The servant clasped her hands to express the astonishment caused by this strange abstemiousness.

It was not thus that her travelling fellow-countrymen were accustomed to treat her.

Rémy, understanding that there was some anger in the servant's manner, threw a piece of silver on the table.

"Oh," said the servant, "for what you have had, my God, you may take back your money. Six farthings' worth for you both."

"Keep the whole piece, my good girl," said the woman. "My brother and I are sparing, it is true, but we do not wish to lessen your profit."

The servant became crimson with joy, yet at the same time tears of compassion moistened her eyes, so sadly had these words been uttered.

"Tell me, my child," said Rémy, "is there a cross road from here to Malines?"

"Yes, monsieur, but it is a bad one, while on the contrary — monsieur perhaps does not know that there is an excellent highway."

"Yes, my child, I knew that, but I must travel by the other."

"Well, I warn you, monsieur, because as your companion is a woman the road will be doubly hard for her."

"And why, my good girl?"

"Because to-night a large number of peasants are crossing the country on their way to Brussels."

"To Brussels?"

"Yes, they are going every moment."

"Why so?"

"I do not know. That is the order."

"An order from whom? The Prince of Orange?"

"No, from monseigneur."

"Who is this monseigneur?"

"Ah, you ask me too much, monsieur. I do not know. But however that may be, since last evening they have been going."

"Who are these emigrants?"

"The inhabitants of the country, the villages, the hamlets, who have neither dykes nor ramparts."

"That is strange," said Remy.

"Why, we ourselves are to leave at daybreak like every one else from the hamlet," said the girl. "Yesterday at eleven o'clock all the cattle were sent to Brussels by the canals and cross roads. That is why the road of which I speak to you is filled with horses, carts, and people."

"Why not the highway? The highway, it seems to me, would be an easier retreat for you."

"I do not know. It is the order."

Rémy and his companion looked at each other.

"But we can keep on this road, can we not? We are going to Malines?"

"I think so. At least unless you prefer to do like every one else, that is, go to Brussels."

Rémy looked at his companion.

"No, no; we will set out at once for Malines!" cried the lady, rising, "open the stable if you please, my good woman."

Rémy, like his companion, arose, murmuring in a low tone:

"Danger for danger. I prefer the one I know. Besides, the young man is ahead of us, and if, by chance, he were to wait for us, — well, we shall see!"

And as the horses had not been even unsaddled, he held the stirrup for his companion, sprang into his own saddle, and daybreak found them on the banks of the Dyle.

CHAPTER LXIX.

EXPLANATION.

The danger which Rémy ran was a real danger, for the traveller of the night, having passed through the hamlet and ridden on for a quarter of a league, perceiving no one on the road, realized that those he was following had stopped in the village.

He was not willing to retrace his steps, no doubt in order to make his pursuit seem as natural as possible; but he lay down in a field of clover, having taken the precaution of making his horse descend into one of the deep ditches which in Flanders serve as boundary lines between estates.

The result of this manœuvre was that the young man could see everything without being seen. We already recognize this young man as Henry du Bouchage. Rémy had recognized him also, and the lady had suspected who he was. By some strange fatality he had again been thrown in the presence of the woman whom he had sworn to flee from.

After his conversation with Rémy on the threshold of the mysterious house, that is, after the loss of all hope, Henry had returned to the Hôtel de Joyeuse, fully decided, as he had said, to give up a life which dawned so wretchedly for him; and, gentlemen at heart and a good son, for he had his father's name to keep pure, he had determined upon the glorious suicide of the battlefield.

Now, they were fighting in Flanders; the Duc de Joyeuse, his brother, commanded an army and could give him an opportunity of getting rid of life. Henry did not hesitate. He left his hotel at the close of the following day, that is, twenty hours after the departure of Rémy and his companion.

Letters which had arrived from Flanders announced a decisive attack on Antwerp. Henry flattered himself he would arrive in time. He took pleasure in the thought that at least he would die sword in hand, in the arms of his brother, beneath a French flag; that his death would cause much talk and that this talk would penetrate the shadows in which the lady of the mysterious house lived.

Noble folly! glorious and gloomy dreams! Henry lived four whole days on his grief, and especially on the hope which it was soon to bring to an end.

Wholly absorbed in these dreams of death, he suddenly perceived the painted spire of the steeple of Valenciennes, and as eight o'clock struck from the tower, he saw that they were about to close the gates; he clapped spurs to his horse, and, passing through the drawbridge, just escaped knocking down a man who was tightening the girths of his saddle.

Henry was not one of those insolent nobles who trampled under foot everything which was not an escutcheon. As he passed he made apologies to the man, who glanced round at the sound of his voice, and then at once turned away.

Henry, carried on by the speed of his horse, whom he strove in vain to stop, trembled as though he had seen something unexpected.

"Oh! I am mad!" he thought; "Rémy at Valenciennes! Rémy, whom I left four days ago in the street Du Bussy; Rémy without his mistress, for he had a young man for companion, it seems to me! In truth, grief is affecting my brain and impairing my eyesight to such a degree that everything which surrounds me is clothed with the form of my unchangeable ideas."

And, continuing on his way, he entered the town without the suspicion which had flashed through his mind having taken root there for a single instant.

He stopped at the first inn he came to, threw his bridle to a stable-boy, and sat down before the door on a bench, while they prepared his room and supper.

But as he sat pensive on this bench, he saw the two trav-

ellers pass, riding side by side, and he noticed that the one he had taken for Rémy frequently turned his head.

The other had his face hidden under a broad-brimmed hat. As he passed in front of the inn, Rémy saw Henry on the bench and again turned aside his head; but this precaution helped even to make him known.

"Oh! this time," murmured Henry, "I am not mistaken. My blood is cool, my eye bright, my ideas clear; recovered from my first hallucination, I am complete master of myself. Now the same phenomenon occurs again, and I still think I recognize Rémy in one of those travellers, that is, the servant of the house in the faubourg. No!" continued he, "I cannot remain in such uncertainty; I must enlighten my doubts without delay."

This resolution taken, Henry rose and set out on the highway in the footsteps of the two travellers; but whether they had already entered some house, or whether they had taken another road, Henry saw them no more.

He ran to the gates; they were closed.

So the travellers could not have gone out.

Henry entered every inn, questioned, sought, and finally learned that two travellers had been seen riding toward an inn of humble appearance, situated in the Rue de Beffroi.

The host was occupied in closing up for the night when Du Bouchage entered.

While the man, attracted by the good looks of the young traveller, offered him his house and his services, Henry gazed into the reception-room, and from where he stood could again see, at the top of the stairs, Rémy, who was going up, lighted by the lamp in the hands of a servant.

Henry could not see Rémy's companion, who, no doubt, had ascended first and had disappeared.

At the top of the stairs Rémy stopped.

Upon seeing that it was really he, the count uttered an exclamation, at the sound of which Rémy turned round.

From his face, so unmistakable from the scar which furrowed it, and from his anxious glance, Henry had no further doubt, and too moved to act at once, he went away, asking himself with a horrible tightening of the heart, why Rémy had left his mistress, and why he was riding alone on the same road as he himself.

We say alone, because at first Henry had paid no attention to the second horseman.

His thoughts rolled from abyss to abyss.

The following day, at the hour when the gates were opened, when he thought he should be face to face with the two travellers, he was greatly surprised to learn that during the night they had obtained permission from the governor to leave; and that, contrary to all custom, the gates had been opened for them.

By this means, and as they had left at one o'clock in the morning, they had six hours' start of Henry.

He had to make up these six hours. Henry put his horse to the gallop, and at Mons overtook the travellers, whom he passed.

He again saw Rémy, but this time Rémy would have had to be a sorcerer to recognize him. Henry was muffled up in a soldier's great cloak, and had brought another horse.

However, the distrustful eye of the faithful servant almost succeeded in baffling this combination. The companion of Rémy, warned by a single word, turned aside his face, which again Henry was unable to see.

But the young man did not lose courage: he made inquiries in the first inn which gave shelter to travellers, and, as he accompanied his questions with an irresistible auxiliary, he finally learned that the companion of Rémy was a very beautiful young man, but very sad, sober, resigned, and that he never spoke of being tired.

Henry trembled as a thought flashed through his mind.

"Might it not be a woman?" he asked.

"That is possible," replied the host; "nowadays many women ride disguised to join their lovers in the army of Flanders, and as our attitude to our guests is to notice nothing, we notice nothing."

This explanation broke Henry's heart. Was it not probable, indeed, that Rémy was accompanying his mistress disguised as a man? Then, if that were so, Henry saw nothing but trouble in the undertaking.

No doubt, as the host had said, the unknown lady was going to join her lover in Flanders.

Rémy therefore had lied when he spoke of her eternal regrets; his story of a past love which would forever clothe his mistress in mourning he had invented to get rid of an importunate lover.

"Well, in that case," said Henry to himself, more overwhelmed by this hope than he had ever been by his despair; "so much the better! The time will come when I shall have an opportunity to speak to this woman and to reproach her with the subterfuges which will lower her, who holds such a high position in my thoughts and in my love, to the level of ordinary women; then, then, I who had imagined her an almost divine creature, seeing this brilliant exterior of a wholly ordinary soul, perhaps, I will hurl myself from the summit of my illusions and from the height of my love."

And the young man tore his hair and struck his breast at the idea that he would perhaps lose in one day the love and the illusions which were killing him, so true is it that a dead heart is better than an empty one.

He was at this point, having passed them, as we have said, and was dreaming of the reason which could have sent these two personages, so indispensable to his existence, to Flanders at the same time as himself when he saw them entering Brussels.

We know how he followed them.

At Brussels Henry gained important information as to the campaign planned by the Duc d'Anjou.

The Flemish were too hostile to the Duc d'Anjou to receive a Frenchman of distinction warmly; they were too proud of the success which the national cause had just won, for it was already a success to see Antwerp close its gates to the prince whom the people of Flanders had called to reign over them; they were too proud, we say, of this success to neglect to humiliate somewhat the gentleman who came from France, and who questioned them with the purest Parisian accent possible, an accent, which, from all time, has seemed so ridiculous to the Belgian people.

Henry now felt serious fears as to this expedition in which his brother was playing so important a part; he determined, consequently, to hasten his journey to Antwerp. It was an indescribable surprise to him to see Rémy and his companion, whatever interest they might have in not being recognized, following without deviation the same road which he was taking. It proved that both were aiming at the same goal.

On leaving the hamlet, Henry hidden in the clover field in which we left him, was sure, this time at least, of clearly seeing the young man who was accompanying Rémy.

Then he would realize the truth and put an end to all uncertainty.

It was then, as we have said, that he beat his breast, so afraid was he of losing the fancy which was devouring him, and which made him live a thousand lives, while killing him.

When the two travellers passed in front of the young man they were far from suspecting that he was hidden there; the lady was busy smoothing her hair, which she had not had time to arrange at the inn. Henry saw her, recognized her, and almost fell fainting into the ditch in which his horse was calmy grazing.

The travellers passed.

Then anger took possession of Henry, who had been good and patient so long as he had thought that the inhabitants of the mysterious house were as loyal as he himself had been.

But after the protestations of Rémy, after the hypocritical consolation of the lady, this journey, or rather this disappearance, constituted a sort of treason towards the man who had so persistently, but at the same time so respectfully, besieged her door.

When Henry had somewhat recovered from this last blow, he shook his beautiful blond hair, wiped his forehead, wet with perspiration, and remounted his horse, fully decided no longer to resort to any of the precautions which respect for himself had made him take, and set out openly and with uncovered face after the travellers. No more cloak, no more hood, no more hesitation on his journey; the road was to him as it was to others, therefore he took possession of it quietly, regulating the steps of his horse according to those of the two horses in front of him.

He had decided to speak neither to Rémy nor to his companion, but merely to make himself known to them.

"Oh! yes, yes," said he to himself, "if there remains in them a particle of feeling, my presence, although brought about by chance, will be nothing less than a bloody reproach for those cruel beings who break my heart at pleasure."

He had not ridden five hundred steps behind the two travellers before Rémy saw him.

Perceiving him thus deliberately, then openly, advancing with raised and uncovered head, Rémy grew anxious.

The lady noticed this and turned around.

"Ah!" said she; "is it not that young man, Rémy?"

Rémy still strove to throw her off the track and to reassure her.

"I think not, madame," said he; "so far as I can judge by his clothes, he is a young Walloon soldier no doubt going to Amsterdam, and passing by the scene of the war to seek some adventure there."

"No matter, I am uneasy, Rémy."

"Reassure yourself, madame; if this young man were the Count du Bouchage, he would already have spoken to us; you know he was persevering."

"I know also that he was respectful, Rémy; otherwise I should have been contented to say to you, 'Get rid of him, Rémy,' and I should have been troubled no further."

"Well, madame, if he were respectful, he has still preserved this respect, and you will have nothing more to fear from him, supposing that it is he, on the road from Brussels to Antwerp, than in Paris in the Rue de Bussy."

"Never mind," continued the lady, still looking behind her, "here we are at Malines; let us change horses if necessary, in order to ride more quickly, but let us hasten and reach Antwerp, let us hasten."

"On the contrary, I would say to you, madame, let us not enter Malines; our horses are good, let us push on as far as the hamlet which we see yonder on the left, and which I think is called Villebrock. In this way we shall avoid town, inn, questions, and curious people, and it will be less embarrassing for us to change our horses or clothes, if we have to change."

"Well, Rémy, straight to the town, then."

They turned to the left into a scarcely opened path, but one which apparently led to Villebrock.

Henry left the road at the same place, took the same path they did, and followed them, still keeping his distance.

The anxiety of Rémy showed itself in sidewise looks, in his agitated manner, especially in that action which had become habitual to him, of looking behind him with a sort of threat, and of suddenly clapping spurs to his horse.

These various symptoms, we may readily understand, did not escape his companion.

They reached Villebrock.

Of the two hundred houses which composed this town not one was inhabited; some forgotten dogs and a few stray cats ran frightened in the solitude, some calling their masters with

long howls, others fleeing lightly away, and stopping, when they thought themselves safe, to show their mobile noses under the cross-beam of a doorway, or from the air-hole of a cellar.

Rémy knocked in twenty places, saw nothing, and was seen by no one.

On his part, Henry, who seemed a shadow attached to the steps of the travellers, had stopped at the first house in town, had knocked at the door, but in vain, like those who preceded him; and then having surmised that the war was the cause of this desertion, he waited to start again until the travellers had come to a decision. This they did after their horses had breakfasted on the grain which Rémy found in the bin of a deserted inn.

"Madame," then said Rémy, "we are no longer in a quiet country nor among ordinary surroundings, and it is not right for us to expose ourselves like children. We will surely fall in with a band of French or Flemish, without counting the Spanish partisans, for in the strange situation in which the people of Flanders are, all sorts of highwaymen, adventurers from every country, are swarming through it; if you were a man, I should speak differently to you, but you are a woman, you are young, you are beautiful; you therefore run a double danger — for your life and your honor."

"Oh! my life, my life, that is nothing," said the lady.

"It is everything, on the contrary, madame," replied Rémy, "when life has an object."

"Well, what would you suggest, then? Think and act for me, Rémy; you know that my thoughts are not on this earth."

"Then, madame," replied the servant, "let us remain here, if you will trust me. I see here many houses which can offer a sure refuge, I have weapons; we can defend ourselves and hide, according as I may think our position strong or weak."

"No, Rémy, no; I must go on, nothing shall stop me," replied the lady, shaking her head; "if I had fears they would be only for you."

"Then," said Rémy, "let us ride on."

And he pushed forward without adding a word. The unknown lady followed him, and Henry du Bouchage, who had stopped at the same time, resumed his journey with them.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE WATER.

As the travellers advanced, the country assumed a strange aspect.

It seemed as deserted as the towns and villages. In short, nowhere were cows seen grazing in the fields, nowhere was the goat clinging to the sides of the mountain or running along the hedges to reach the green buds of the bramble-bushes and the young vines, nowhere were seen the shepherd and his flock, nowhere the plough and its laborer, no hawker passing from one country to another, his bale on his back, no teamster singing the hoarse song of the Northman, and swinging along merchant fashion, by the side of his cart, a heavy stick in his hand.

As far as eye could reach across the magnificent plains, over the small hills, and the deep grasses, to the edge of the woods beyond, not a human figure was to be seen, not a voice to be heard. One would have said that it was nature the night before man and beast were created.

Evening came on and Henry, filled with surprise, and drawn by his feelings close to the travellers who preceded him, asked of the air, the trees, the distant horizon, even of the clouds, an explanation of this sinister phenomenon.

The only persons who animated the gloomy solitude were Rémy and his companion, outlined against the purple tint of the setting sun, leaning over to hear if there were not some sound; then behind them, a hundred feet away, the figure of Henry, always keeping the same distance and the same attitude.

Night descended dark and cold; the wind from the north-west whistled through the air and filled the solitude with its sound more threatening than the silence.

Rémy stopped his companion by laying his hand on the reins of her horse.

"Madame," said he, "you know that I am not given to fear, you know that I would not take one backward step to save my life, but this evening something strange possesses me, an unknown torpor chains my faculties, paralyzes me, and prevents my going further. Madame, call this terror, timidity, or even

panic; I will admit it — for the first time in my life, I am afraid."

The lady turned; perhaps all these gloomy presentiments had escaped her, perhaps she had seen nothing.

"He is still there?" she asked.

"Oh, it is no longer a question of him," replied Rémy; "think no more of him, I beg you; he is alone, and I am equal to a single man. No, the danger I fear, or rather feel and divine, with a sort of instinct rather than by aid of my reason, — this danger which approaches, threatens, and which perhaps surrounds us, is different, strange, that is why I call it a danger."

The lady shook her head.

"Madame," said Rémy, "do you see yonder some willows bending their black tops?"

"Yes."

"By the side of those trees I perceive a small house; for pity's sake, let us go there; if it is inhabited, all the more reason for demanding hospitality; if not, let us take possession of it, madame. Do not make any objection, I beseech you."

Rémy's emotion, his trembling voice, the touching persuasion of his words, induced his companion to yield.

She turned her horse in the direction indicated by Rémy.

A few minutes later the travellers knocked at the door of the house, which stood under a clump of willows.

A river, an affluent of the Nethe, a small river which ran a quarter of a league from there, enclosed between two arms of reeds and grassy banks, bathed the feet of the willows with its murmuring water; behind the house, built of brick and covered with tiles, was a small garden, surrounded by a quickset hedge.

Everything was empty, solitary, desolate.

No one answered the repeated knocks of the travellers.

Rémy hesitated no longer, but drew his knife, cut a willow twig and inserted it between the door and the lock and bore down on the bolt.

The door opened.

Rémy entered quickly. For an hour he had acted with the nervousness of a man working under the influence of a fever. The lock — clumsy result of the work of a neighboring smith — yielded without resistance.

Rémy hurriedly pushed his companion into the house, closed the door behind him, drew the massive bolt, and thus retrenched, breathed as if he had just recovered his life.

Not content with having sheltered his mistress thus, he installed himself in a solitary room on the first floor, in which, by feeling about, he came upon a bed, a chair, and a table. Then, somewhat easy on her account, he descended to the ground floor, and sat down to watch between the iron bars of the window, through a half-open shutter, the movements of the count, who, seeing them enter the house, had instantly drawn near.

The reflections of Henry were sombre and in harmony with those of Rémy.

"Surely," said he to himself, "some danger unknown to us, but known to the inhabitants, hovers over the land; the war is ravaging the country; the French have taken Antwerp or are going to take it; seized with terror, the peasants have sought shelter in the cities."

This explanation was plausible and yet it did not satisfy the young man.

Moreover, it brought him to another line of thought.

"What are Rémy and his mistress going to do in this part of the country?" he asked himself. "What imperative necessity drives them towards this terrible danger? Oh! I shall know, for the moment has finally come to speak to this woman and to put an end forever to all my doubts. Nowhere has so good an opportunity presented itself."

And he advanced towards the house.

But suddenly he stopped.

"No, no," said he, with one of those sudden hesitations so common to hearts in love, "no, I will be the martyr to the end. Besides, is she not mistress of her actions, and does she know what story has been invented about her by her miserable Rémy? Oh! it is with him, it is with him alone I am vexed, with him, who assured me that she loved no one! But still, let me be just: should this man betray to me, a stranger, the secrets of his mistress? No, no! My wretchedness is certain, and the worst of it is that it comes from myself alone and that I cannot throw its weight on any one. What it lacks is the whole revelation of the truth; I must see this woman arrive at camp, hanging on the arm of some gentleman, and saying to him: 'See how I have suffered, and realize how I love you!'

Well, I will follow her as far as that; I will see what I dread to see, and I will die for it; it will be pain spared the musket and cannon. Alas! thou knowest it, my God!" added Henry, with one of those outbursts which at times lay deep in his soul, full of religion and love, "I did not seek the supreme agony; I was going smiling to a settled, calm, and glorious death; I wanted to fall on the battlefield with one name on my lips, thine, O God! with one name in my heart, hers! Thou hast not so willed it. Thou hast destined me to a despairing death, full of bitterness and torture; praise be to Thee, I accept it!"

Then, recalling the days of waiting and the nights of agony which he had spent before that inexorable house, he found, on the whole, apart from the doubt which was gnawing at his heart, that his position was less cruel than in Paris, for he now could see her occasionally and could hear the sound of her voice, which he had not heard before; and in following her, some of those subtle perfumes which emanate from the woman we love had mingled with the breeze and come to caress his face.

So he continued, his eyes fixed on the hut in which she was hiding.

"But while waiting for this death, and while she is in this house, I will take these trees for a shelter; and yet I complain, I, who can hear her voice if she speaks, I, who can see her shadow behind the window! Oh! no! no! I will not complain. Lord, Lord! I am indeed too happy!" and Henry lay down under the willows, the branches of which covered the house, and listened with a feeling of melancholy impossible to describe to the murmur of the water running at his side. Suddenly he shuddered: the noise of cannon sounded from the north and passed by, borne by the wind.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "I shall arrive too late; they are attacking Antwerp."

Henry's first thought was to rise, remount his horse, and ride, guided by the sound, to where they were fighting; but to do this he would have to leave the unknown lady and die in doubt.

Had he not met her on the road, Henry would have continued his way, without a backward glance, without a sigh for the past, without a regret for the future; but by meeting her, doubt had entered into his soul, and with doubt, irresolution. He remained, therefore.

For two hours he lay there, listening to the successive reports which mocked him, asking himself what could be the irregular and louder reports which from time to time interrupted the others.

He was far from suspecting that these sounds were caused by the blowing up of the vessels of his brother.

At last, towards two o'clock, everything grew calm; by half-past two all was still. The noise of the cannon had not reached the interior of the house, apparently, or, if it had, the temporary inhabitants were insensible to it.

"By this time," said Henry to himself, "Antwerp is taken, and my brother is conqueror; but after Antwerp comes Ghent; after Ghent, Bruges, and I shall still have an opportunity to die gloriously. But before dying I want to know what this woman seeks in the camp of the French."

After these sounds, which had shaken the air, had ceased, Nature sank to rest, and Joyeuse, covered with his cloak, became quiet.

He had fallen into that kind of drowsiness, which, toward the close of the night, the will of man cannot resist, when suddenly his horse, which was grazing a few feet from him, pricked up his ears and neighed mournfully.

Henry opened his eyes.

The animal, standing on his four feet, his head turned in the opposite direction from his body, was drawing in the air, which, having changed at the approach of daylight, came from the southeast.

"What is the matter, my good steed?" asked the young man, rising and patting the animal's neck with his hand; "have you seen some otter pass, which frightened you, or are you regretting the shelter of a good stable?"

The animal, as if he understood the question, and was trying to answer, looked in the direction of Lier with a quick, nervous motion and, with eyes fixed and nostrils open, listened.

"Ah! ah!" murmured Henry, "it is more serious than I thought, apparently; perhaps some troops of wolves following the army to devour bodies."

The horse neighed, bent his head, and by a movement as quick as lightning started toward the west.

But as he started, he passed within reach of the hand of his master, who seized him by the bridle and stopped him.

Henry, without gathering hold of the reins, caught hold by

the mane and sprang into the saddle. Once there, as he was a good horseman, he mastered the animal and kept him under control.

But at the end of an instant, that which the horse had heard Henry himself began to hear, and the terror which the lower brute had felt, the man was astonished to feel in turn.

A long murmur, like that of the wind, at once strident and melancholy, rose from different points of a semi-circle which seemed to extend from the south to the north; puffs of fresh breeze charged with particles of water at intervals lightened the murmur, which then became like the roar of the tide rising on a pebbly beach.

"What is that?" asked Henry, "can it be the wind? No, since it is the wind which brings me the noise, and since the two sounds seem distinct. An army on the march, perhaps? but no" (he placed his ear to the ground), "I should hear the fall of the feet, the clashing of arms, the murmur of voices. Is it the crackling of a fire? No, again, for no light is visible on the horizon, and the sky seems dark."

The sound increased and became a roar, incessant, deep, rumbling, such as thousands of cannon might produce, dragged from a distance over an echoing pavement.

For an instant Henry thought he had found the cause of the noise, in attributing it to what we have mentioned, but immediately:

"Impossible," said he, "there is no paved street around here, and not a thousand cannon in the army."

The sound came nearer. Henry put his horse to a gallop and rode to a hill.

"What do I see?" he cried, as he reached the summit.

That which the young man saw, his horse had seen before him, for he could not make him advance in that direction except by tearing his sides with his spurs, and when he reached the summit of the hill the animal reared so that his rider was almost thrown from him. That which they saw, horse and rider, was a long, pale band on the horizon and level with it, advancing over the plain, forming an immense circle and rushing towards the sea.

By degrees the band grew wider and wider in the eyes of Henry, like a piece of cloth which one unfolds.

The young man, still undecided, looked at this strange phenomenon, when on glancing at the place he had just left,

he saw that the prairie was becoming saturated with water, that the little river was overflowing its banks, and beginning to hide beneath its bosom, upheaved without visible cause, the reeds which a quarter of an hour before had stood on the two banks.

Gently the water was reaching to the side of the house.

"Wretched madman that I am!" exclaimed Henry. "I did not dream of this! It is the water! the water! The Flemish have broken their dikes!"

Henry at once rushed to the house and knocked furiously at the door.

"Open! open!" he cried.

No one answered.

"Open, Rémy," cried the young man, furious from terror. "Open, it is I, Henry du Bouchage, open!"

"Oh! you need not tell me your name, count," replied Rémy from within, "I recognized you long ago; but I warn you of one thing: if you force this door, you will find me behind it, a pistol in each hand."

"But you do not understand, wretched man!" cried Henry in a tone of despair; "the water, the water, it is the water!"

"No invention, no pretext, no dishonorable ruses, count. I tell you that you will enter here only by passing over my body."

"In that case I will pass over it!" cried Henry, "but I will enter. In Heaven's name, in God's name, in the name of your safety and that of your mistress, will you open the door?"

"No!"

The young man looked around him and saw one of those Homeric stones, such as Ajax Telamon rolled upon his enemies; he raised this between his arms, lifted it above his head, and approaching the house, hurled it at the door.

The latter broke into fragments.

At the same time a ball whizzed by the ears of Henry, but failed to touch him.

Henry sprang upon Rémy, who fired his second pistol, but the priming alone caught fire.

"Why, you can easily see that I am not armed, madman!" cried Henry; "do not defend yourself any longer against a man who is not attacking you, but look! look!"

And he dragged him to the window, which he broke with a blow of his fist.

"Now!" said he, "do you see? do you see?"

And he showed him an immense sheet of water which was growing white along the horizon, and which, as it drew near, thundered like the front of a mighty army.

"The water!" murmured Rémy.

"Yes! the water! the water!" cried Henry; "it is coming upon us; look below; the river is overflowing, it rises; in five minutes we cannot get away from here."

"Madame!" cried Rémy, "madame!"

"No shouting, no fright, Rémy. Make ready the horses; but quick! quick!"

"He loves her," thought Rémy, "he will save her."

Rémy ran to the stable. Henry rushed to the stairs.

At Rémy's cry the lady had opened her door.

The young man raised her in his arms as he would have raised a child.

But she, thinking it treason or violence, struggled with all her might, and clung to the partitions.

"Tell her," cried Henry, "tell her that I am saving her!"

Rémy heard the young man's cry, just as he returned with the two horses.

"Yes! yes!" he cried. "Yes, madame, he is saving you, or rather he will save you; come! come!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE FLIGHT.

Henry, without losing time to reassure the lady, carried her out of the house, and attempted to place her on his horse with him. But with a movement of uncontrollable repugnance she slipped out of his encircling arms, and was caught by Rémy, who seated her on the horse prepared for her.

"Oh! what are you doing, madame?" cried Henry, "how you misunderstand my heart. It is not a question of myself, believe me, or of the pleasure of holding you in my arms, or of pressing you against my breast, although for that privilege I would gladly sacrifice my life; it is a question of fleeing more rapidly than a bird. Look! look! See the birds flying by."

In truth, in the early light of dawn they saw flocks of curlews and of pigeons flying through the air in rapid and startled flight, and in the night — the usual refuge of the silent bat — these noisy flocks, favored by the sombre wind, conveyed something sinister to the ear and startling to the eye.

The lady did not reply, but as she was in her saddle she rode forward without turning her head.

However, her horse and Rémy's, having journeyed for two days, were wearied.

At every instant Henry turned back, and seeing that they were unable to keep up with him:

"See, madame," said he, "how my horse keeps ahead of yours, and yet I am holding him back with both hands. For pity's sake, madame, while there is still time, I am not asking to carry you in my arms, but take my horse and give me yours."

"Thank you, no, monsieur," replied the lady in her still, calm voice, and without betraying the least anger in her tone.

"But, madame," cried Henry, glancing desperately behind him, "the water is gaining on us. Listen! listen!"

That instant a horrible crashing was heard. It was the dike of a village, which the flood had just broken down. Beams, props, terraces had given way, a double row of piles had broken in with a thundering noise, and the water rushing over all this ruin was beginning to flood a forest of oak-trees, the tops of which quivered and the branches of which cracked as if a whole legion of devils were passing beneath them.

The uprooted trees dashed against the pines, the timbers of the fallen houses floated on the surface of the water, the distant neighing of horses, the cries of men carried away by the flood, formed a concert of sounds so strange and so lugubrious that the shudder which went through Henry passed to the calm, indomitable heart of the stranger.

She clapped spurs to her horse, and the animal, as though he himself felt the imminence of the danger, redoubled his efforts to escape from it.

But the water was gaining, still gaining, and in ten minutes it was evident that it would overtake the travellers.

Every instant Henry stopped to wait for his companions and cry out:

"Quicker, madame, for pity's sake, quicker. The water is gaining on us. It is rushing, here it is!"

In short, it had reached them, foaming, turbulent, raging; it carried away like a feather the house in which Rémy had sheltered his mistress; it raised like a bit of straw the bark fastened to the bank of the river; and majestic, mighty, coiling its waves like the rings of a serpent, it towered like a wall over the horses of Rémy and the lady.

Henry uttered a cry of terror and turned upon the water as if he would fight it.

"You see you are lost," he shouted in despair, "but, madame, perhaps there is still time. Dismount, come with me, come!"

"No, monsieur," said she.

"But in a minute it will be too late. Look, look behind you."

The lady turned her head. The water was scarcely fifty feet from her.

"Let my destiny be accomplished," said she. "You, monsieur, flee! flee!"

Rémy's horse, exhausted, fell forward, unable to rise, in spite of the efforts of his rider.

"Save her! save her!" cried Rémy, "even in spite of herself."

As the faithful servant leaned over to free himself from his stirrups, the water rolled down like a gigantic tomb over his head.

At sight of this his mistress uttered a terrible cry, and sprang from her horse, resolved to die with Rémy.

But Henry, seeing her intention, had jumped down at the same time. He seized her and circled her waist with his right arm; then remounted his horse and darted forward like an arrow.

"Rémy! Rémy!" cried the lady, her arms extended toward him, "Rémy!"

A cry answered her. Rémy had come up to the surface of the water, and, although half unconscious, with that indomitable hope which sustains a dying man to the end of his agony, he began to swim, supported by a beam.

His horse passed by him, beating the air desperately with his forefeet while the water gained on the horse of his mistress, while not more than twenty feet away Henry and his companion no longer ran but flew on the third horse, wild with terror.

Rémy no longer regretted life, since he thought that she whom he loved would be saved.

"Farewell, madame, farewell!" he cried; "I leave first and I will tell the one who awaits us that you are living to"—

He did not finish. A mountain of water passed over his head and broke at the feet of Henry's horse.

"Rémy! Rémy!" cried the lady. "Rémy! I wish to die with you. Monsieur, I will wait for him. Monsieur, I wish to dismount. In the name of the living God, I will!"

She uttered these words with such fierceness and savage authority that the young man loosened his arms and let her slip to the ground, saying,

"Very well, madame, we will all three die here: thanks to you, you have given me a joy for which I never hoped."

As he uttered these words and still holding his horse, the roaring water reached him as it had reached Rémy, but by a last effort of love he still held the arm of the young woman who had jumped to the ground.

The flood swept over them. The raging water rolled them for several seconds pell mell with other débris.

It was a sublime sight, the coolness of this man so young and so devoted, whose shoulders rose above the water while he held his companion by the hand, and while his knees, guiding the last efforts of the expiring horse, strove to be useful in the supreme efforts of his agony.

For an instant there was a terrible struggle, during which the lady, sustained by Henry's right hand, still kept her head above the water, while with his left hand Henry pushed aside the masses of floating wood and the corpses, contact with which would have drowned or killed his horse.

As it passed them, one of these floating bodies sighed out:

"Farewell, madame, farewell!"

"Heavens," cried the young man, "it is Rémy. Well, I will save him too."

And without stopping to calculate the danger of the additional weight, he seized Rémy by the sleeve, drew him to his left side, and saw him breathe freely.

But just then the horse, exhausted by the triple weight, sank to his neck, then to his eyes, finally his broken legs gave way, and he disappeared entirely.

"We must die," murmured Henry. "My God, take my life; it has been pure. You, madame, receive my soul: it is yours."

Just then Henry felt that Rémy was slipping from him; he

HE TURNED AND SAW RÉMY, WHO HAD JUST REACHED A BOAT.

made no effort to hold him; any resistance would have been useless.

His only thought was to keep the lady above water, so that she might at least be the last to die, and so that he could say to himself at the final moment that he had done all he could to struggle for her against death.

Suddenly, and when he was thinking of nothing more except of dying himself, a cry of joy rose at his side.

He turned and saw Rémy, who had just reached a boat. This boat had belonged to the small house which we have seen removed by the water. The flood had carried it away, and Rémy, who, thanks to the aid which Henry had given him, had recovered his strength, seeing it pass within reach, had left the others, panting, and in two strokes had reached it.

Its oars were fastened to its boarding; a boat hook rolled on the bottom.

He handed the hook to Henry, who took it, dragged the lady with him, raised her above his shoulders and gave her into Rémy's hands. Then, seizing the ledge of the boat, he climbed in after them.

The first rays of the sun were waking, showing the flooded plains and the boat balancing on them like an atom on that ocean covered with débris.

About two hundred feet away to the left rose a small hill entirely surrounded by water, which looked like an island in the middle of the sea.

Henry took the oars and rowed to the hill, towards which, for that matter, the current was already driving them. Rémy took the hook and, standing in the bow, set to work to push aside the planks and timbers, against which the boat might dash. Thanks to his strength and to Rémy's skill, they touched, or rather they were thrown against, the hill.

Rémy sprang ashore, and seized the chain of the boat, which he drew towards him.

Henry advanced to take the lady in his arms, but she gave him her hand, and rising by herself, she stepped ashore.

Henry heaved a sigh; for an instant the idea came to him to throw himself into the water and die before her eyes; but an irresistible feeling held him to life as long as he could see this woman whose presence he had desired so long without ever obtaining it.

He drew the boat ashore, and sat down ten feet from the

lady and Rémy, pale, dripping with water which ran down his clothes, and which was more painful than blood.

They were saved from the most imminent danger, that is from the water; the flood, strong as it was, never rose to the height of the hill.

Below them they could now contemplate the grand wrath of the waves which had no anger above them save that of God. Henry watched the swift water pass, roaring, carrying masses of French corpses, and near them their horses and arms.

Rémy felt an acute pain in his shoulder; a floating plank had struck him at the moment his horse had fallen under him.

His companion, aside from the cold she felt, had no wound; Du Bouchage had secured her against everything which was in his power to guard her against.

Henry was greatly surprised to see that these two beings, so miraculously saved from death, had thanked only him, and that for God, the chief author of their safety, they had not a single word of gratitude.

The young woman was the first to rise: she noticed that at the extremity of the horizon, on the west side, there was to be seen something like fires through the mist.

It goes without saying that these fires were burning on an elevated point which the flood could not reach.

As far as they could judge in the midst of the cold dawn which had succeeded the night, they were about a mile away.

Rémy advanced to the point of the hill facing these fires, and came back and said he thought that almost a thousand feet from the spot where they had landed, there was a kind of jetty which ran in a direct line to the fires.

What made Rémy think it a jetty, or at least a road, was the fact that it was a double line of trees, straight and regular.

Henry, in turn, made his observations, which were found to agree with those of Rémy, and yet in this he had to depend much on chance.

The water, carried down the slope of the plains, had hurled them to the left of their way by making them describe a considerable angle; this turning aside, added to the furious course of the horses, had removed every means of their knowing where they were.

It is true that daylight was appearing, but cloudy and heavy

with mist; in clear weather, and under a pure sky, the steeple of Malines could have been seen, from which they were only about two miles distant.

"Well, count," said Rémy, "what do you think of those fires?"

"Those fires, which seem to announce a hospitable shelter, seem to me suspicious, and I mistrust them."

"Why so?"

"Rémy," said Henry, lowering his voice, "look at all these corpses; all are French, not one is Flemish; they announce a great disaster; the dikes have been broken in order to complete the destruction of the French army if it has been conquered, in order to destroy the effect of its victory if it has been triumphant. Why may not these fires have been lighted by enemies just as well as by friends? or why may they not simply be a ruse to attract fugitives?"

"And yet," said Rémy, "we cannot remain here; the cold and want of food will kill my mistress."

"You are right, Rémy," said the count; "stay here with madame while I go to the jetty, and I will come back and tell you the news."

"No, monsieur," said the lady, "you shall not expose yourself alone. We have been saved together; we will all die together. Rémy, your arm, I am ready."

Every word of this strange creature had an irresistible accent of authority, which no one for a single instant thought of disobeying.

Henry bowed and walked on ahead.

The flood was calmer, the jetty, which ended in the hill, formed a kind of bay in which the water slept. All three stepped into the small boat, which was again launched in the midst of the débris and floating bodies. A quarter of an hour later they landed on the jetty.

They fastened the chain of the boat to the foot of a tree, landed a second time, followed the jetty for almost an hour, and reached a group of Flemish huts, in the midst of which, on a square planted with lime trees, were gathered about a great fire two or three hundred soldiers, above whom were floating the folds of a French flag.

All at once the sentinel stationed at about a hundred feet from the bivouac lighted the match of his musket, crying:

"Who goes there?"

"France," replied Du Bouchage. Then turning towards Diana:

"Now, madame," said he, "you are saved; I recognize the field-colors of the gendarmes of Aunis, a company of noblemen in which I have friends."

At the cry of the sentinel and at the response of the count, some gendarmes ran towards the newcomers, doubly welcome in the midst of this terrible disaster, in the first place because they had survived the disaster, secondly because they were fellow-countrymen.

Henry made himself known personally by mentioning his brother. He was eagerly questioned and related in what a miraculous way he and his companions had escaped death, but said nothing further.

Rémy and his mistress seated themselves in silence in a corner; Henry went to them to ask them to draw near the fire. Both were dripping with water.

"Madame," said he, "you will be as much respected here as in your own house. I took the liberty of saying that you were one of my relatives; pardon me."

And without waiting for the thanks of those whose lives he had saved, Henry withdrew to join the officers who were waiting for him.

Rémy and Diana exchanged a look which had it been seen by the count would have been the thanks so well merited for his courage and delicacy.

The gendarmes of Aunis, of whom our fugitives had just asked hospitality, had retreated in good order after the rout and the panic of the chiefs.

Wherever there is homogeneity of position, identity of sentiment, habit of living together, it is not rare to see spontaneity of execution after unity of thought. This is what happened that night to the gendarmes of Aunis. Seeing their leaders abandon them and the other regiments seeking their safety in various directions, they stared at one another, closed their ranks instead of breaking them, put their horses to the gallop, and under the leadership of one of their ensigns whom they greatly loved on account of his bravery, and whom they respected to an equal degree because of his birth, they set out for Brussels.

Like all the actors of that terrible scene, they saw the whole progress of the flood, and were followed by the furious waters;

but good luck willed that on the way they should come to the town of which we have spoken, a position at once strong against men and the elements. The inhabitants, knowing that they were safe, had not left their houses, except the women, the old men, and the children, who had been sent to the city; so, when the gendarmes of Aunis arrived, they found resistance; but death was raging behind them; they fought like desperate men, conquered every obstacle, lost ten men in the attack of the causeway, but took possession of it and drove away the Flemish.

An hour afterwards the town was entirely surrounded by water, except on the side of the causeway by which we have seen Henry and his companions land. Such was the story that the gendarmes of Aunis told Du Bouchage.

"And the rest of the army?" asked Henry.

"Look," answered the ensign, "at every moment corpses are passing which will answer your question."

"But — but my brother?" ventured Du Bouchage, in a choking voice.

"Alas! count, we are not able to give you certain news of him; he fought like a lion; three times we dragged him from the fight. It is certain that he survived the battle, but as to the flood we cannot say."

Henry lowered his head and was lost in bitter thought; then all at once:

"And the duke," he asked.

The ensign leaned towards Henry, and in a low tone:

"Count," said he, "the duke escaped among the first. He was mounted on a horse which had a white star on its forehead. All at once we saw the horse pass in the midst of a mass of débris; the leg of its rider was caught in the stirrup and was floating on a level with the saddle."

"Good God!" cried Henry.

"Good God!" murmured Rémy, who, having risen at these words of the count, — "and the duke?" — had just heard this story, and glanced quickly at his pale companion.

"Afterwards?" said the count.

"Yes, afterwards?" stammered Rémy.

"Well! in the eddy which the water formed in the corner of the dike, one of my men ventured forth to seize the floating reins of the horse; he reached him and raised the dead animal. Then we saw the white boot and the gold spur

which the duke always wore. But at that instant the water rose as if indignant at seeing its prey snatched from it. My gendarme let go in order not to be dragged down, and everything disappeared. We shall not have even the consolation of giving a Christian burial to our prince."

"Dead! dead! he too, the heir to the throne! What a calamity!"

Rémy turned to his companion, and with an expression impossible to describe:

"He is dead, you see, madame!" said he.

"May the Lord be praised who has saved me from a crime!" replied she, raising her hands and eyes to Heaven in token of gratitude.

"Yes, but He has deprived us of revenge."

"God always has the right to remember. Vengeance belongs to man only when God forgets."

The count saw with a kind of terror this exaltation of the two strange people whom he had saved from death; he watched them from afar and sought in vain to gain some idea of their desires, to note their gestures and the expression of their faces.

The voice of the ensign drew him from his contemplation.

"But you yourself, count," demanded the latter, "what are you going to do?"

The count shuddered.

"I?" said he.

"Yes, you."

"I shall wait here until the body of my brother passes before me," replied the young man in a tone of gloomy despair; "then I will try to draw him to land in order to give him Christian burial, and believe me, once I hold him, I shall not let him go."

These sinister words were overheard by Rémy, and he turned a look full of affectionate reproach on the young man.

As for the lady, after the ensign had announced the death of the Duc d'Anjou, she heard nothing more, for she had begun to pray.

CHAPTER LXXII.

TRANSFIGURATION.

After she had finished praying, Rémy's companion rose so beautiful and so radiant that the count gave a cry of surprise and admiration.

She seemed awakening from a long sleep, the dreams of which had wearied her brain and ruffled the calm of her features, a leaden sleep, which stamps on the damp forehead of the sleeper the chimerical tortures of her dream.

Or rather, she was like the daughter of Jairus, awakened in the midst of her death at the tomb and rising from her funeral couch, already purified and ready for Heaven. The young woman, having come out of this lethargy, glanced about her with a look so sweet, so soft, and gentle, and filled with such angelic goodness, that Henry, credulous like all lovers, thought she was growing tender towards his sufferings, and that at last she would yield to a feeling, if not of kindness, at least of gratitude and pity. While the gendarmes, after their frugal repast, were sleeping here and there among the rubbish; while Rémy himself gave way to sleep, and let his head lean against the beam of a wall against which his bench was propped, Henry sat down beside the young woman, and in a voice so low and so gentle that it seemed a murmur of the breeze:

"Madame," said he, "you live! Oh! let me tell you all the joy with which my heart overflows when I see you here in safety, after having seen you on the threshold of the tomb."

"That is true, monsieur," replied the lady, "I live through you; and," she added with a sad smile, "I wish I could tell you that I am grateful."

"In fact, madame," said Henry, with a sublime effort of love and abnegation, "I saved you only to return you to those whom you love!"

"What are you saying?" asked the lady.

"To those you are about to join through so many perils," added Henry.

"Monsieur, those whom I love are dead, and those whom I was to join are dead also."

"Oh! madame," murmured the young man, falling on his knees, "look at me, on me, who have suffered so deeply, on me, who have loved you so well! Oh! do not turn away; you are young, you are as beautiful as an angel in Heaven. Read in my heart, which I open to you, and you will see that this heart contains not one atom of love as other men understand it. You do not believe me! Think of the past hours; weigh them one by one; which one gave me joy? which one hope? and yet I persisted. You made me weep, I swallowed my tears; you made me suffer, I devoured my grief; you drove me to death. I went to it uncomplaining. Even now, when you turn aside your head, when each of my words, burning as it is, seems a drop of ice water falling on your heart, my soul is full of you, and I live only because you live. Just now was I not about to die with you? What did I ask for? Nothing. Did I touch your hand? Never except to drag you from mortal danger. I held you in my arms to snatch you from the waves, but did you feel the pressure of my breast? No, I am no longer anything but a soul, and everything in me has been purified by the consuming fire of my love."

"Oh! monsieur, for pity's sake do not speak to me in this way."

"For pity's sake too, do not kill me. I have been told that you love no one; oh! repeat this assurance to me; it is a singular favor, is it not, for a man to beg to have himself told that he is not loved? but I prefer that, since at the same time you tell me that you are insensible to all. Oh! madame, madame, you who are the sole adoration of my life, answer me."

In spite of the insistence of Henry, a sigh was the young woman's only reply.

"You tell me nothing," said the count; "Rémy, at least, had more pity for me than you; he strove to console me. Oh! I see, you do not answer me, because you do not want to tell me that you were going to Flanders to join some one happier than I, I, who nevertheless am yours; I, who carry in my life a part of my brother's hopes; I, who am dying at your feet without your having said to me 'I have loved, but I no longer love;' or else 'I love, but I shall cease loving.'"

"Monsieur le Comte," replied the young woman, with a solemn dignity, "do not say to me the things which are said to any woman. I am a creature of another world, and I do not

live in this. Had I seen you less noble, less good, less generous, if at the bottom of my heart I had not had for you the sweet, tender smile of a sister for her brother, I would say to you, 'Rise, Monsieur le Comte, and no longer importune me, for I have a horror of every word of love.' But I am not going to say this to you, Monsieur le Comte, for I suffer in seeing you suffer. I will say more: now that I know you, I will take your hand, I will lay it on my heart, and I will gladly say to you: See, my heart no longer beats; live near me, if you will, and assist day by day, if such is your pleasure, in the sad exemption of a body killed by the tortures of the soul; but this sacrifice which you accept as a happiness, I am sure" —

"Yes! yes!" cried Henry.

"Well, I ought to refuse it. From to-day something has changed in my life. I no longer have the right to lean on any arm in the world, not even on that of the faithful friend, the noble being, who sleeps yonder, and who for an instant is oblivious to happiness! Alas! poor Rémy," she continued, giving to her voice the first inflection of feeling which Henry had noticed in her; "poor Rémy, your awakening also will be sad; you know not the progress of my thoughts, you do not read my eyes, you do not know that when your sleep is over you will be alone on earth, for I must go alone to God."

"What are you saying?" cried Henry; "are you thinking of dying too? You!"

Rémy, awakened by the sad cry of the young count, raised his head and listened.

"You saw me praying, did you not?" continued the young woman.

Henry made an affirmative sigh.

"This prayer was my farewell to earth; the joy which you saw on my face, the joy which now overwhelms me, is the same that you would notice in me were the angel of death to come to me and say: 'Rise, Diana, and follow me to the feet of God!'"

"Diana! Diana!" murmured Henry, "I know your name now — Diana! dear name! adorable name!" — and the wretched man sank at the feet of the young woman, repeating the name in the intoxication of an indescribable happiness.

"Oh! silence," said the young woman, in her solemn voice. "Forget this name which escaped me; no one among the living has a right to wound my heart by uttering it."

"Oh! madame, madame," cried Henry, "now that I know your name, do not tell me that you are going to die."

"I do not say that, monsieur," said the young woman, in her serious voice; "I say that I am going to leave this world of tears, of hatred, of dark passions, of vile interests, and of nameless desires; I say that I have nothing further to do among the creatures whom God has created like me; I no longer have tears in my eyes; the blood no longer beats in my heart; not a single thought has revolved in my brain since the thought that wholly filled it died; I am no longer anything but a worthless victim, since I sacrifice nothing, neither desire nor hopes, by renouncing the world; but such as I am, I offer myself to God; He will take me in pity, I trust, He who has made me suffer so deeply, and who has not been willing for me to succumb to my grief."

Rémy, who had overheard these words, rose slowly and went straight to his mistress.

"You are going to leave me?" he asked in a gloomy tone.

"For God," replied Diana, raising towards Heaven her pale, emaciated hand, resembling that of the sublime Magdalene.

"That is true!" replied Rémy, letting his head fall forward on his breast; "that is true!"

And as Diana dropped her hand, he took it between both of his and pressed it to his breast as he would have done to the relic of a saint.

"Oh! what am I before these two hearts," sighed the young man, with a shudder of fear.

"You are the only living being," said Diana, "at whom I have looked twice since I condemned my eyes to be forever closed."

Henry knelt down.

"Thank you, madame," said he, "you have just revealed yourself to me wholly; I see my destiny clearly; from this moment not one word from my lips, not a hope or an aspiration of my heart shall betray in me the one you love. You belong to the Lord, madame, and I am not jealous of God."

He had just finished speaking and had risen, filled with the regenerating charm which accompanies every great and strong resolution, when from the plain, still covered with mists, which each moment were lifting, there came the sound of distant trumpets.

The gendarmes sprang to their arms and were on their horses before the command had been given.

Henry listened.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried he, "those are the trumpets of the admiral; I recognize them, I recognize them; my God, may they announce my brother!"

"You see very well that you still want something," said Diana, "and that you still love some one. Why, then, my friend, should you choose despair, like those who desire nothing further, like those who love no one?"

"A horse!" cried Henry, "will some one lend me a horse?"

"But where are you going," asked the ensign, "since the water surrounds us on all sides?"

"You see the plain can be crossed; you see that they must be marching, since their trumpets sound."

"Ride up to the causeway, Monsieur le Comte," replied the ensign, "the weather is clearing, and perhaps you will be able to see."

"I will go," said the young man.

In fact, Henry rode towards the eminence indicated by the ensign; the trumpets still sounded at intervals, without either coming nearer or going away.

Rémy resumed his seat near Diana.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

A QUARTER of an hour later Henry returned. He, as well as every one else, had seen on the hill that which the night prevented them from seeing — a considerable detachment of French troops cantonned and entrenched. With the exception of a wide ditch of water which surrounded the town occupied by the gendarmes of Aunis, the plain, like a pond which is emptied, was beginning to grow clear, the natural slope of the land drew off the waters toward the sea, and several points more elevated than the others began to reappear, as after a deluge.

The muddy slime of the running water had covered the entire country, and, as the wind lifted the veil of mist stretched over the plain, it was a sad sight to see some fifty horsemen stuck in the mud, and vainly striving to reach either the town or the hill. From the latter their cries of distress

had been heard, and that is why the trumpets were sounding incessantly.

As soon as the wind had succeeded in chasing away the fog, Henry perceived on the hill the flag of France floating proudly in the breeze. The gendarmes on their side hoisted the pennant of Aunis, and from both sides were heard musket-shots fired in token of joy.

Towards eleven o'clock the sun shone out upon this scene of desolation, drying up some parts of the plain, and making practicable a sort of route of communication.

Henry, who had tried this route, was the first to perceive from the sound of his horse's hoofs that by making a circular turn, a paved road led from the town to the hill; he concluded from this that the horses would sink in the mud above their hoofs, to the middle of their legs, perhaps to their breasts, but no farther, sustained as they would be by the solid foundation of the soil.

He asked to put this to proof, and as no one offered to accompany him in the dangerous undertaking, he put Rémy and his companion in care of the ensign, and ventured forth on the perilous road.

Just as he left the town a horseman was seen descending the hill, and, like Henry, trying on his side to set out towards the town.

The whole slope of the hill which faced the town was covered with anxious soldiers, who raised their arms to Heaven, and seemed trying to stop the imprudent horsemen by their supplications.

The two deputies of these two fragments of the great French army went their way bravely, and soon they saw that their task was less difficult than they had feared, and especially than had been feared for them. A wide stream of water, which had escaped from an aqueduct dug by the fall of a beam, issued forth below the mud and, as though designedly, washed the miry causeway, showing under its limpid waves the bottom of a ditch sought by the active feet of the horses. The horsemen were no more than two hundred feet from each other.

"France!" cried the one coming from the hill.

And he raised his cap shaded by a white plume.

"Oh! is it you?" exclaimed Henry, with a great cry of joy, "you, my lord?"

"You, Henry! you, brother!" exclaimed the other.

And at the risk of swerving to the right or the left, the two horses set off at a gallop towards each other, and soon, amid the frantic shouts of the spectators on the causeway and the hill, the two riders embraced long and tenderly.

At once the town and the hill became depopulated; gendarmes and light horse, Huguenot gentlemen and Catholics, hastened along the road opened by the two brothers.

Before long both camps were joined, arms were opened, and on the road where all thought they would meet death, three thousand French gave thanks to Heaven and cried, "Long live France!"

"Gentlemen," said the voice of a Huguenot gentleman suddenly, "we must shout 'Long live the Admiral!' for it is to Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse and no other that we owe our lives to-night, and this morning the joy of embracing our countrymen."

A great shout followed these words.

The two brothers exchanged a few words with tears; then the first spoke.

"And the duke?" asked Joyeuse of Henry.

"He is dead, it seems," replied the latter.

"Is the news authentic?"

"The gendarmes of Aunis saw his horse drowned, and recognized him. The horse was still dragging in his stirrup a rider whose head was under water."

"This is a sad day for France," said the admiral.

Then turning to his men:

"Come, gentlemen," said he aloud, "let us not lose time. Once the water has subsided, we shall very probably be attacked. Let us entrench ourselves until news and provisions reach us."

"But, monseigneur," replied a voice, "the cavalry cannot march; the horses have eaten nothing since four o'clock yesterday, and the poor beasts are dying of hunger."

"There is some corn in our camp," said the ensign; "but what shall we do for the men?"

"Well!" said the admiral, "if there is corn, it is all I ask; the men shall live like the horses."

"Brother," interrupted Henry, "try, I beg you, to let me have a moment's talk with you."

"I am going to occupy the town," replied Joyeuse; "choose some lodging for me and wait for me there."

Henry went back to his two companions.

"Here you are in the midst of an army," said he to Rémy; "believe me, you must hide in some lodging which I will find. It is not right for madame to be seen by every one. This evening, when every one has gone to sleep, I will suggest a way to set you free."

Rémy therefore with Diana installed himself in the lodging which was given him by the ensign of the gendarmes, who, on the arrival of Joyeuse, at the orders of the latter, had become a simple soldier again.

Towards two o'clock the Duc de Joyeuse entered the town, amid the sound of trumpets, quartered his troops, and gave strict orders that all disorder should be avoided.

Then he made a distribution of barley to the men, oats to the horses, and water to every one, gave to the wounded some barrels of beer and wine which were found in cellars, and himself, as he made his round of inspection in sight of all, dined on a piece of black bread and a glass of water. Everywhere he was received like a savior, with shouts of love and gratitude.

"Well, well," said he, on his return, finding himself alone with his brother, "let the Flemish come, and I will fight them; and, good God, if this continues, I will even eat them, for I am half-starved, and," he added in a low tone to Henry, throwing into a corner his bread, which he had appeared to eat with such relish, "that is execrable food!"

Then flinging his arms around his brother's neck:

"Ah! now, my friend, let us talk, and tell me why you are in Flanders, when I thought you in Paris."

"Brother," said Henry to the admiral, "life became unbearable in Paris, and I set out to find you in Flanders."

"Still from love?" asked Joyeuse.

"No; from despair. Now, I swear to you, Anne, I am no longer in love; my passion is madness."

"Brother, brother," cried Joyeuse, "permit me to say to you that you have fallen in with a wretched woman."

"How so?"

"Yes, Henry, it happens that beyond a certain degree of wickedness or virtue, human beings overstep the will of the Creator, and become hangmen and homicides, whom the Church equally disapproves of; so being too virtuous to pay attention to the sufferings of others is barbarous exaltation and lack of Christian charity."

"Oh! brother, brother," cried Henry, "do not calumniate virtue!"

"Oh! I am not calumniating virtue, Henry; I am assuring vice, that is all. Therefore I repeat, this woman is a bad woman, and possession of her, desirable as it may be, would never be worth the torments she makes you suffer. Well! my God! it is in such a case that we should use our strength and power; for we defend ourselves legitimately instead of attacking. By the devil, Henry, I well know that in your place I should have taken this woman's house by storm; I should have taken her herself in the same way as I took her house, and then when, according to the habit of every tamed creature, who becomes as humble before her conqueror as she has been fierce before the struggle, when she came and threw her arms about my neck, saying to me, 'Henry, I adore you!' I should repulse her, and answer, 'You do well, madame; it is your turn. I have suffered enough for you to suffer also.'"

Henry seized his brother's hand.

"You do not believe one word of what you have been saying," said he.

"Yes, on my honor."

"You, so good, so generous!"

"Generosity towards people without heart is trickery, brother."

"Oh! Joyeuse, Joyeuse, you do not know this woman."

"A thousand demons! I do not want to know her."

"Why not?"

"Because she would make me commit what others would call a crime, but which I myself would call an act of justice."

"Oh! my good brother," said the young man, with an angelic smile, "how happy you are in not loving! But, if you please, Monseigneur l'Admiral, let us leave my foolish love-affair, and talk about the war."

"Very good, for in speaking of your madness you make me mad."

"You see that we lack food."

"I know it, and I have already thought of a way of procuring some."

"And you have found it?"

"I think so."

"What is your plan?"

"I cannot stir from here before receiving news of the army,

since this position is good, and I can defend it against five-fold forces; but I can send out a company of scouts; they will first find the news, which is the real life of men reduced to our present situation; next, food, for in truth, this Flanders is a fine country."

"Not very, brother, not very."

"Oh! I am speaking only of the earth as God made it, and not of the men, who always spoil the work of God. Do you know, Henry, what foolishness this prince has committed, what part he lost? how pride and precipitation quickly ruined him, this unfortunate Francis? — God has his soul, let us speak no more about it; but truly he could have won immortal glory, and one of the most beautiful kingdoms of Europe, while he has been attending to the affairs of whom? — of William the Silent. For that matter, do you know, Henry, that the Antwerpers fought bravely?"

"And you too, according to what people say, brother."

"Yes, I had one of my lucky days, and then there was something which inspired me."

"What?"

"I met on the battlefield a swordsman of my acquaintance."

"A Frenchman?"

"A Frenchman."

"In the Flemish ranks?"

"At their head. Henry, here is a secret which must be known as the sequel to the execution of Salcède on the Place de Grève."

"And now, dear brother, here you are back again, safe and sound, to my great joy; but I have as yet done nothing and must do something now."

"What do you want to do?"

"Give me the command of your scouts, I beg you."

"No, that is really too dangerous, Henry; I would not use this word before strangers, but I do not wish to make you die an obscure death, and consequently an ugly death. The scouts might meet a company of those villanous Flemish who fight with scythes and flails; you might kill a thousand of them; there would still remain one, one who would cut you in two or disfigure you. No, Henry, no, if you absolutely insist upon dying I can give you something better than that."

"Brother, give me what I ask, I beg you; I will take all possible precaution and I promise I will return."

"Ah! I understand."

"What do you understand?"

"You wish to try if the noise of some brilliant action will not soften the heart of this obstinate woman. Acknowledge that this is what makes you so insistent."

"I will admit it, if you wish, brother."

"So be it, you are right. Women who resist a great love sometimes yield to a little noise."

"I do not hope for that."

"Triple fool that you are, then, if you do it without this hope."

"Stop, Henry, do not seek any other reason for the refusal of this woman unless she is a capricious individual who has neither eyes nor heart."

"You give me this command, do you not, brother?"

"I must, since you wish it."

"I may leave this very night?"

"That is imperative, Henry; you understand we cannot wait any longer."

"How many men will you place at my disposal?"

"One hundred, no more. I cannot weaken my position, Henry. You readily understand that."

"Fewer, if you wish, brother."

"No, for I should like to be able to give you double that number. Only give me your word of honor that if you encounter more than three hundred men you will beat a retreat instead of letting yourself be killed."

"Brother," said Henry, smiling, "you are selling dearly a glory which you will not give me."

"Then, my dear Henry, I will neither sell it nor give it to you; another officer shall command the reconnoitring party."

"Brother, give your orders and I will execute them."

"You will fight, then, only against forces equal, double, or triple, but you will not go beyond that?"

"I swear it."

"Very well; now what men do you want?"

"Let me take a hundred men from the gendarmes of Aunis; I have quite a number of friends in this regiment, and in choosing my men I can do as I please with them."

"Agreed, then, as to the gendarmes of Aunis."

"When shall I leave?"

"At once. You will have rations given to your men for one

day, to the horses for two. Remember that I wish to have prompt and sure reports."

"I leave, brother; have you any secret order?"

"Do not spread abroad the death of the duke; let it be supposed that he is in my camp. Exaggerate the number of my forces, and if you find the body of the prince, although he may have been a bad man and a poor general, nevertheless, he belonged to the house of France, so have him put into an oak coffin and sent back by your gendarmes, in order that he may be buried in Saint Denis."

"Very well, brother; is this all?"

"All."

Henry took the hand of his elder brother to kiss it, but the latter clasped him in his arms.

"Once again, promise me, Henry," said Joyeuse, "that this is not a deception you are practising in order to win a brave death."

"Brother, I had that idea in coming to join you; but I swear I no longer have the thought."

"When did it leave you?"

"Two hours ago."

"Why?"

"Brother, excuse me."

"Very well, Henry, very well, your secrets are your own."

"Oh! how good you are, brother!"

And the young men fell a second time into each other's arms, and separated, but not without again looking back at each other, not without smiling and waving their hands.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE EXPEDITION.

Henry, transported with joy, hastened to join Diana and Rémy.

"Be ready in a quarter of an hour," said he to them, "for we are to start. You will find two horses already saddled at the door of the small wooden stairway which leads to this corridor; mingle with our men, and say nothing."

Then appearing on the balcony which went around the house:

"Trumpets of the gendarmes!" cried he, "sound the signal to saddle!"

At once the call resounded through the town, and the ensign and his soldiers ranged themselves in front of the house.

Their men came behind them with a few mules and two wagons. According to the advice given them, Rémy and his companion slipped in among them.

"Gendarmes," said Henry, "my brother, the admiral, has temporarily given me the command of your company, and has charged me to go reconnoitring; one hundred of you are to accompany me; the mission is a dangerous one, but it is for the safety of all that we march forward. What men will volunteer?"

The three hundred men came forward.

"Gentlemen," said Henry, "I thank you all; it has been justly said that you were the flower of the army, but I do not wish to make a choice, chance must decide. Monsieur," continued Henry, addressing the ensign, "draw lots, I beg of you."

During this operation, Joyeuse gave his final instructions to his brother.

"Listen, Henry," said he, "the country is drying up; according to the peasants, there must be a communication between Conticq and Rupelmonde; you will march between two rivers, the Rupel and the Scheldt; for the Scheldt, you will find before Rupelmonde some boats brought from Antwerp; the Rupel it is not necessary to cross. Moreover, I hope you will not need to go as far as Rupelmonde to find storehouses and mills."

At these words Henry started to go.

"Wait a moment," said Joyeuse to him, "you forget the principal thing; my men have taken three peasants, I will give you one of them for a guide. No false pity; at the first approach of treason, a pistol-shot or the thrust of a dagger."

This last point decided on, he embraced his brother tenderly, and gave orders to start.

The hundred men drawn by lot by the ensign, with Du Bouchage at their head, at once set out.

Henry placed the guide between two gendarmes who held revolvers in their hands. Rémy and his companion mingled with the others.

Henry had made no suggestion in regard to them, thinking

that curiosity about them was already sufficiently excited without augmenting it still more by precautions more dangerous than helpful.

He himself without having wearied or importuned his hosts by a single glance, on leaving the town took his place at the side of the company. The troop marched slowly, for every now and then the road would give way unexpectedly beneath the feet of the horses, and the entire detachment would find themselves in the mire. As long as they could not find the road for which they were looking, they had to resign themselves to marching as if they were in trammels.

Occasional spectres, fleeing at the sound of the horses, crossed the plain; they were peasants returning somewhat too early to their homes, afraid of falling into the hands of the enemy they had striven to annihilate. Sometimes too, they were only unhappy Frenchmen, half dead from cold and hunger, incapable of struggling against armed men, and who in the uncertainty as to whether they were falling into the hands of friend or foe, preferred to wait for daylight before resuming their painful journey.

They made two leagues in three hours; these two leagues brought the adventurous party to the banks of the Rupel, along which ran a stone road; but then danger succeeded difficulty; two or three horses lost footing in the crevices of the stones, or slipped on the muddy pavement, and with their riders, rolled into the still rapid current of the river. More than once, a boat anchored to the opposite shore fired some shots which wounded two army servants and one gendarme. One of the two servants had been wounded at the side of Diana; she had felt pity for the man, but no fear for herself. Under these varying circumstances, Henry showed himself to be a worthy captain for his men and a true friend; he rode at the head, forcing the entire troop to follow in his steps, and trusting less to his own shrewdness than to the instinct of the horses his brother had given him; in this way he led the entire company in safety, he alone risking death. Three leagues from Rupelmonde the gendarmes met half a dozen French soldiers crouching before a peat fire; the wretched men were cooking a quarter of horse flesh, the only food they had had for two days.

The approach of the gendarmes caused great excitement among the guests of the sad feast. Two or three arose as if to

flee; but one of them remained seated, and restrained the others, saying:

"Well! if they are enemies they will kill us, and the affair will be over at once."

"France! France!" cried Henry, who had overheard the words; "come to us, you poor fellows."

The men, recognizing countrymen, ran to them. Cloaks were given them, and a glass of gin. Furthermore, permission was granted them to mount behind the servants. In this way they followed the detachment. Half a mile further on they came upon four light-horse with one horse among them. They were received in the same way.

At length they reached the banks of the Scheldt. The night was dark; the gendarmes found two men there, who, in bad Flemish, were trying to get a boatman to row them to the opposite shore. The man was refusing, with threats. The ensign spoke Dutch, and advanced gently at the head of his men. While the column halted, he overheard these words:

"You are French; you must die; you cannot pass."

One of the two men held a dagger to his throat, and without taking the trouble of trying to address him in his own language, said in excellent French:

"It is you who must die, Flemish that you are, if you do not let us pass at once."

"Stand firm, monsieur, stand firm!" cried the ensign; "in five minutes we shall be with you."

But during the movement the two Frenchmen had made on hearing these words, the boatman unfastened the knot which held his boat to the bank, and disappeared rapidly, leaving the others on the shore.

One of the gendarmes, however, realizing of what use the boat might be, entered the river on his horse, and killed the boatman with a shot from his pistol.

The boat, without a guide, turned round of its own accord; and as it had not reached the middle of the river, the eddy drove it back to shore. The two men took possession of it as soon as it touched the bank, and sat down in it. This haste on their part to get away surprised the ensign.

"Well, gentlemen, who are you, if you please?"

"Monsieur, we are officers in the marine regiment, and you are gendarmes from Aunis, apparently?"

"Yes, gentlemen, and very glad to have been of use to you; will you not accompany us?"

"Willingly, gentlemen."

"Get into the wagons, then, if you are too tired to walk."

"May I ask where you are going?" said the one of the two marine officers who had not yet spoken.

"Monsieur, our orders are to push on as far as Rupelmonde."

"Be careful," went on the same speaker; "we did not cross the river earlier, because this morning a troop of Spaniards passed on their way from Antwerp; at sunset we thought we might venture across. Two men do not arouse suspicion, but you, a whole company" —

"That is true," said the ensign, "I will speak to our chief."

He called Henry, who approached and asked what was the matter.

"It seems," replied the ensign, "that these gentlemen met a troop of Spaniards this morning following the same road as ourselves."

"How many were there?" asked Henry.

"Fifty or so."

"Well! and is this what stops you?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte; and yet I think it would be wise to make sure of the boat, at any cost; twenty men can make a stand, and if it were necessary to cross the river, in five trips and by leading our horses, the operation would be accomplished."

"That is well," said Henry, "let them keep the boat; there must be some houses at the junction of the Rupel and the Scheldt."

"There is a village," said a voice.

"Let us go there, the angle formed by the junction of the two rivers is a good position. Gendarmes, forward! Let two men descend the river with the boat while we march along the shore."

"We will direct the boat," said one of the two officers, "if you wish it."

"Very good, gentlemen," said Henry, "but do not lose sight of us, and join us as soon as we reach the village."

"But if we abandon the boat, and it is taken away from us?"

"A hundred feet from the village you will find a post of ten men, to whom you will deliver it."

"Very well," said the marine officer.

And with a vigorous stroke of the oars he left the bank.

"That is strange," said Henry, resuming his march, "I know that voice."

An hour later he found the village guarded by the troop of Spaniards of whom the officer had spoken; surprised when they least expected it, they made but little resistance.

Henry disarmed the prisoners, put them into the strongest house of the village, and placed a post of ten men to guard it; another post of ten men was sent to look after the boat; ten other men were scattered as sentinels at various points, with the promise of being relieved at the end of an hour. Henry then decided that they should sup in parties of twenty, in the house opposite the one in which the Spanish prisoners were confined. The supper for the first fifty or sixty was ready; it was that of the post they had just captured.

Henry chose a room on the first floor for Diana and Rémy, whom he did not wish to have sup with the rest. He placed the ensign and seventeen men at table, and charged him to ask to supper the two marine officers, guardians of the boat.

Then before sitting down himself he visited the men in their various positions.

At the end of half an hour Henry returned. This half hour had sufficed for him to make sure of lodging and food for all his men, and to give the necessary orders in case of a surprise from the Hollanders. The officers, in spite of his request not to be anxious about him, had waited for him before beginning the meal; but they had taken their seats at table and some of them were so weary that they had fallen asleep in their chairs.

The entrance of the count awakened the sleepers, and caused all to rise. Henry glanced around the room.

Brass lamps, suspended from the ceiling, gave out a smoky and almost dense light.

The table, covered with cheese, bread, and pork, with a mug of fresh beer for each man, would have had an appetizing appearance even for men who for twenty-four hours had lacked nothing whatever. They pointed out to Henry the seat of honor.

Henry took it.

"Eat, gentlemen," said he.

As soon as this permission was given, the sound of the

knives and forks on the china plates proved that it had been waited for with a certain impatience and received with supreme satisfaction.

"By the way," asked Henry of the ensign, "did you find our two marine officers?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Where are they?"

"Yonder, at the foot of the table."

Not only were they seated at the further end of the table, but in the darkest part of the room.

"Gentlemen," said Henry, "you have poor seats, and you are not eating, apparently."

"Thanks, count," replied one of them, "we are very tired, and, as a matter of fact, we have greater need of sleep than of food; we have already said this to your officers, but they insisted, saying that you had given orders for us to have supper with you. This is a great honor, and we thoroughly appreciate it. Nevertheless, if instead of detaining us longer you would be good enough to have a room given us" —

Henry had listened with the greatest attention, but it was evident that it was the voice rather than the words which he heard.

"This is the wish of your companion, also?" asked Henry when the marine officer had finished speaking. He glanced so closely at the companion, who kept his hat pulled down over his eyes, and obstinately refused to utter a word, that several of the guests began to look at him also.

The latter, forced to reply to the count's question, uttered these two words in an almost unintelligible manner:

"Yes, count."

The young man gave a start. Rising, he walked straight to the end of the table, while those present followed his movements and the manifestation of his evident astonishment with singular attention.

He stopped near the two officers.

"Monsieur," said he to the one who had first spoken, "will you do me a favor?"

"What, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Assure me that you are not the brother of Monsieur Aurilly, or perhaps Monsieur Aurilly himself."

"Aurilly!" cried all the guests.

"And will your companion," continued Henry, "be kind

enough to raise his hat which hides his face? Otherwise I shall call him monseigneur, and bow before him."

And, hat in hand, Henry saluted the stranger respectfully. The latter raised his head.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" cried the officers.

"The duke alive!"

"Faith, gentlemen," said the officer, "since you want to recognize your conquered and fugitive prince, I will no longer resist the manifestation, for which I thank you; you are not mistaken, gentlemen, I am indeed the Duc d'Anjou."

"Long live monseigneur!" cried the officers.

CHAPTER LXXV.

PAULUS ÆMILIUS.

All these acclamations, although sincere, startled the prince.

"Silence! silence, gentlemen!" said he; "do not be happier than I am, I beg you, at the good luck which has come to me. I am enchanted at not being dead, I entreat you to believe, and yet if you had not recognized me I should not have been the first to boast of being alive."

"What! monseigneur," said Henry; "you recognized me? you found yourself in the midst of a troop of French, you saw us frantic over your loss, and you let us feel grief on account of it?"

"Gentlemen," replied the prince, "besides a number of reasons which made me desire to preserve my incognito, I admit that since I was supposed to be dead, I should not have been sorry for this opportunity, which probably would not have arisen in my lifetime, to know something of the funeral oration which would be pronounced over my tomb."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur!"

"No, truly," went on the duke, "I am a man like Alexander of Macedon; I wage war in an artistic manner, and I take pride in it, like every artist. Well! without vanity, I believe I made a mistake."

"Monseigneur," said Henry, lowering his eyes, "do not say such things, I beg you."

"Why not? There is no one but the pope who is infallible,

and since Boniface VIII., even this infallibility has been greatly discussed."

"See to what you would have exposed yourself, monseigneur, had one of us ventured to give his opinion on this expedition, and if this advice had been to blame."

"Well! why not? Do you think that I have not already sufficiently blamed myself, not for having engaged in battle, but for having lost it?"

"Monseigneur, this kindness frightens us, and if your highness will allow me to say so, your gayety is not natural. Will your highness have the goodness to reassure us by telling us that you do not suffer?"

A terrible cloud passed over the brow of the prince, covering it, already so dark, with a sinister veil.

"No," said he, "no. I never felt better, thank God, than at present, and I am very happy in the midst of you all."

The officers bowed.

"How many men are under your command, Du Bouchage?" asked the duke.

"One hundred and fifty, monseigneur."

"Ah! Ah! one hundred and fifty to twelve thousand was the proportion of the battle of Cannæ, gentlemen. They will send a bushel of your rings to Antwerp, but I doubt if the Flemish beauties can use them, unless they have their fingers tapered with the knives of their husbands; they cut well, those knives!"

"Monseigneur," said Du Bouchage, "if our battle is a battle of Cannæ, we are more fortunate than the Romans, for we have saved our Paulus Æmilius."

"On my soul, gentlemen," said the duke, "the Paulus Æmilius of Antwerp is Joyeuse, and, no doubt, to carry the resemblance with its heroic model to the end, your brother is dead, is he not, Du Bouchage?"

Henry felt his heart torn by this cold question.

"No monseigneur," he replied, "he is alive."

"Ah! so much the better," said the duke, with his icy smile. "So our brave Joyeuse has survived! Where is he that I may embrace him?"

"He is not here, monseigneur."

"Ah, yes, wounded?"

"No, monseigneur, safe and sound."

"But a fugitive like myself, wandering, hungry, a poor and

discreditable warrior, alas! The proverb is right: 'For glory the sword; after the sword, blood; after blood, tears.'"

"Monseigneur, I was ignorant of the proverb, but in spite of it, I am glad to inform your highness that my brother had the good fortune to save three thousand men, with whom he is occupying a large town seven miles from here, and such as your highness sees me, I am marching as scout for his army."

The duke turned pale.

"Three thousand men!" said he, "and it is Joyeuse who saved these three thousand men? Do you know, your brother is a Xenophon! By Heaven! it is very fortunate that my brother sent me yours; otherwise I should be returning to France all alone. Long live Joyeuse, by Heaven! Deuce take the house of Valois! Faith, it cannot take for motto *Hilariter*."

"Monseigneur! oh, monseigneur!" murmured Du Bouchage, overwhelmed with grief, seeing that this hilarity of the prince hid a morbid and painful jealousy.

"No, on my soul, I speak the truth, do I not, Aurilly? We return to France like Francis I. after the battle of Pavia. Everything is lost, honor most of all! Ah! ah! ah! I have found the motto for the house of France!"

A gloomy silence followed this laughter as heartbreaking as if it had been sobs.

"Monseigneur," interrupted Henry, "tell me how the tutelary god of France saved your highness."

"Well! my dear count, it is very simple: the tutelary god of France was evidently occupied with something more important at that moment, so I escaped by myself."

"How so, monseigneur?"

"Why, by running away!"

Not a smile followed this joke, which the duke would certainly have punished with death, had it been made by any one but himself.

"Yes, yes, that is the word. My, how we ran!" he continued, "did we not, my brave Aurilly?"

"Every one," said Henry, "realizes the cool bravery and the military genius of your highness; therefore we beg you not to break our hearts by assuming faults which you have not. The best general is not invincible, and Hannibal himself was conquered at Zama."

"Yes," replied the duke, "but Hannibal had won the battles

of Trebia, Trasimene, and Cannæ; while as to me, I have won only that of Cateau Cambrésis; it is not enough, truly, to sustain the comparison."

"But monseigneur jokes when he says he fled?"

"No! by Heaven! I do not joke. Besides, do you find anything in it to joke about, Du Bouchage?"

"Could we have done otherwise, count?" said Aurilly, thinking that it was time to come to the assistance of his master.

"Keep still, Aurilly," said the duke; "ask the shade of Saint Aignan if we could not have kept from running away?"

Aurilly lowered his head.

"Ah! you do not know the story of Saint Aignan, it is true; I will tell it to you in three grimaces."

At this reference, which was especially revolting under the circumstances, the officers frowned, without caring whether they displeased their chief or not.

"Know, gentlemen," said the prince, without in the least appearing to notice this sign of disapproval, "know that just as the battle was declared lost, he gathered together five hundred horses, and, instead of running away like every one, he came to me and said: 'We must attack, monseigneur.' 'What, attack?' I replied; 'you are mad, Saint Aignan, they are a hundred against one.' 'Were they a thousand,' he replied, with his frightful grimace, 'I should attack.' 'Attack, my dear fellow, attack,' I replied; 'I, on the contrary will not attack.' 'Then you will give me your horse, which can no longer hold out, and you will take mine, which is fresh; as I shall not run, any horse will do for me.' And he took my white horse, and gave me his black one, saying: 'Prince, here is a courser which will make twenty leagues in four hours, if you wish.' Then turning to his men: 'Come, gentlemen,' said he, 'follow me; forward, those who do not wish to run away!' And he spurred his horse towards the enemy with a second grimace more hideous than the first. He thought he would find men, he found water; I had foreseen the event. Saint Aignan and his Paladins remained. Had he listened to me, instead of performing that useless feat of valor, we should have him at this table, and he would now be making a third grimace probably even uglier than the first two."

A shudder of horror ran through the circle of those present.

"This wretch has no heart," thought Henry. "Oh! why do his misfortune, his shame, and above all his birth, protect

him against the words we should take so much pleasure in saying to him?"

"Gentlemen," said Aurilly in a low voice, for he felt the terrible effect produced among that gathering of brave men by the words of the prince; "you see how affected monseigneur is; pay no attention to his words, therefore; since the trouble which has come to him, I really believe he has moments of delirium."

"And that," said the prince, emptying his glass, "is how Saint Aignan died and how I lived; for the rest, in dying, he rendered me a last service; he made people believe, as he rode my horse, that it was I who had died, so that this rumor spread, not only through the French army, but through the Flemish army as well, which then gave up its pursuit of me. But reassure yourselves, gentlemen, our good Flemish will not always be able to boast of the affair; we will have our revenge, gentlemen, and a bloody one; since yesterday I have organized, mentally at least, the most formidable army that ever existed."

"In the meantime, monseigneur," said Henry, "your highness will take command of my men; it no longer belongs to me, a simple gentleman, to give a single order where there is a son of France."

"Very well," said the prince, "and I will begin by ordering every one to sup, and you especially, Monsieur du Bouchage, for you have not even touched your plate."

"Monseigneur, I am not hungry."

"In that case, Du Bouchage, my friend, go and visit the posts. Announce to the chiefs that I am living, but beg them not to rejoice too openly over it, before we have gained a better citadel or rejoined the corps of the army of our invincible Joyeuse, for I confess that I care less than ever to be captured now that I have escaped fire and water."

"Monseigneur, your highness shall be carefully obeyed, and no one except these gentlemen shall know that you have done us the honor of remaining with us."

"And these gentlemen will keep my secret?" asked the duke.

Every one bowed.

"Pay your visits now, count."

Du Bouchage left the room.

As we see, it took but an instant for this vagabond, this

fugitive, this conquered man, to become proud, careless, and imperious again.

To command a hundred or a hundred thousand men was nevertheless to command; the Duc d'Anjou would have done the same with Joyeuse. Princes never demand what they think they deserve, but what they believe to be their right.

While Du Bouchage was carrying out the order, all the more promptly as he wished to seem to obey less from spite, Francis asked questions, and Aurilly, the shadow of the master, who followed his every movement, did likewise. The duke thought it surprising that a man of the name and rank of Du Bouchage should have consented to take the command of a handful of men, and take charge of so dangerous an expedition. It was, indeed, the post of a simple ensign, and not that of the brother of a grand admiral. With the prince everything looked suspicious, and every suspicion had to be explained away. He persisted, therefore, and learned that the grand admiral, in placing his brother at the head of the reconnoitring party, had only yielded to his urgent entreaty.

The one who gave this information to the duke and who gave it without any evil intention was the ensign of the gendarmes of Aunis, who had received Du Bouchage, and had seen his own command removed from him, as Du Bouchage had just seen his taken away by the duke.

The prince thought he saw a slight feeling of irritation in the heart of the ensign against Du Bouchage; that is why he questioned him particularly.

"But," demanded the prince, "what was the count's reason for asking so urgently for such a trifling command?"

"In the first place to render a service to the army," said the ensign, "and this feeling I do not doubt."

"In the first place, you said; what is *next*, monsieur?"

"Ah! monseigneur," said the ensign, "I do not know."

"You are either deceiving me or yourself, monsieur, for you certainly know."

"Monseigneur, even to your highness I can give only the reasons connected with my service."

"You see, gentlemen," said the prince, turning to the officers seated at table, "I was perfectly right in trying to hide, since there are secrets in my army from which I am excluded."

"Ah! monseigneur," exclaimed the ensign, "your highness

does not fully understand my discretion; there are secrets only in that which concerns Monsieur du Bouchage: perhaps, for instance, while serving the general interest, Monsieur Henry may have wanted to do a favor to some relative or friend, by escorting him."

"Who among us is a relative or friend of the count? Let him speak that I may embrace him; come!"

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, mingling in the conversation with that respectful familiarity to which he was accustomed, "monseigneur, I have just discovered a part of the secret, and there is nothing in it to make your highness distrustful. This relative whom Monsieur du Bouchage wished to escort, well" —

"Well?" said the prince; "finish, Aurilly."

"Well, monseigneur, it is a woman."

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" cried the duke. "Why did they not tell me the thing frankly? This dear Henry! Why! it is perfectly natural — Come, come, let us shut our eyes to the woman, and speak no more of her."

"Your highness will do all the better," said Aurilly, "as the thing is most mysterious."

"How so?"

"Yes, the lady, like the celebrated Bradamantile whose story I have sung to your highness twenty times, the lady is disguised in man's clothes."

"Oh! monseigneur," said the ensign, "I beg you: Monsieur Henry seemed to me to have great respect for this lady; and in all probability would be angry at any indiscretion."

"No doubt, no doubt, monsieur, we shall be as silent as the tomb, you may be sure, as mute as poor Saint Aignan; moreover, if we see the lady, we will try not to make grimaces at her — Ah! Henry has a relative with him, in the midst of the gendarmes. Where is she, Aurilly, this relation?"

"Upstairs."

"What! upstairs, in this very house?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but hush! Here comes Monsieur du Bouchage."

"Yes, hush!" repeated the prince, bursting into laughter.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

A MEMORY OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

On entering, the young man heard the fatal laugh of the prince; but he had not lived enough with his highness to understand all the threats hidden under a joyful manifestation of the Duc d'Anjou. He might have perceived, also, from the restlessness of some of the faces, that a hostile conversation had been carried on by the duke in his absence, and that it was interrupted by his return. But Henry was not distrustful enough to guess what had been going on; and no one was friend enough to tell him in the presence of the duke.

Besides, Aurilly kept good watch, and the duke, who, no doubt, had almost perfected his plan, kept Henry near him until all the officers present at the conversation had retired.

The duke had made some changes in the distribution of the posts. Thus, when he was alone, Henry had thought it right to hold the centre post, since he was in command, and to establish his headquarters in the house with Diana. He sent the ensign to the most important post after that, which was on the river bank.

The duke, having become chief in place of Henry, took the latter's place, and sent Henry to where the ensign was to have been sent. The prince saw that this was the most important point, and entrusted it to him; it was a perfectly natural thing to do, so natural that every one, Henry first of all, agreed with the idea. But he thought he ought to say a word to the ensign of the gendarmes, and went to him. It was perfectly natural, also, that he should put in his protection the two persons over whom he was watching, and whom he was forced to leave, temporarily, at least. But at the first words which Henry attempted to exchange with the ensign, the duke intervened.

"Secrets?" said he with his smile.

The gendarme had realized but too late the indiscretion he had committed. He repented of it and wished to come to the aid of the count.

"No, monseigneur," he replied; "the count was merely asking me how many pounds of dry powder remained in a condition to be used."

This answer had two objects, if not two results: the first to

turn away the suspicions of the duke, if he had any; the second to show the count that he had an ally on whom he could rely.

"Ah! that is another thing!" replied the duke, forced to believe the words under penalty of compromising his dignity of prince by the rôle of spy.

Then while the duke turned towards the door:

"His highness knows that you are escorting some one," whispered the ensign to Henry.

Du Bouchage gave a start, but he was too late. The act itself had not escaped the duke, and as if to assure himself that the orders had everywhere been carried out, he proposed to the count to conduct him to his post, a suggestion which the latter was forced to accept. Henry had intended to warn Rémy to be on his guard; and to prepare some answer in advance, but there was no way of accomplishing it; all he could do was to take leave of the ensign with these words:

"Watch the powder carefully, will you not? Watch it as I myself would do."

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," replied the young man.

On the way the duke asked Bouchage:

"Where is this powder you entrusted to our young officer, count?"

"In the house where I established my headquarters, your highness."

"Rest easy, Du Bouchage," replied the duke. "I realize too well the importance of such a trust, in our present situation, not to give it my whole attention. It is not our young ensign who will watch it, but I myself."

The conversation stopped there. Without further words they reached the junction of the two rivers; the duke strongly impressed upon Du Bouchage the importance of his not leaving his post, and returned. He found Aurilly had not left the supper-room, but was lying on a bench, sleeping in an officer's cloak.

The duke tapped him on the shoulder and awoke him. Aurilly rubbed his eyes and looked at the prince.

"You heard?" demanded the latter.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Aurilly.

"But do you know to what I refer?"

"By Heaven! to the unknown lady, the relative of the Count du Bouchage."

"Good: I see that the faro of Brussels and the beer of Louvan have not yet clouded your brain."

"Why, monseigneur, you have but to speak or merely make a sign, and your highness will see that I am more ingenious than ever."

"Well, then, call all your imagination to your aid and guess."

"Well, monseigneur, I guess that your highness is curious."

"Ah! By Heaven! that is a matter of temperament; it it merely a question of telling me what rouses my curiosity as present."

"You desire to know who is the brave creature who follows these two De Joyeuses through fire and water."

"*Per mille penricula Martis!* as my sister Margot would say, if she were here; you have touched the point, Aurilly. By the way, have you written to her, Aurilly?"

"To whom, monseigneur?"

"To my sister Margot."

"Have I written to her majesty?"

"Yes."

"About what?"

"Why about our having been defeated, by Heaven! ruined, and that she must look out for herself."

"In what respect, monseigneur?"

"Spain being rid of me in the north, will fall on her in the south."

"Ah! that is so."

"You have not written?"

"Why! monseigneur" —

"You were sleeping."

"Yes, I admit it; but still, even had the idea of writing come to me, with what could I have written, monseigneur? I have neither pen, ink, nor paper here."

"Well, look for some. *Quære et invenies*, the Gospel says."

"How the devil can your highness expect me to find all that in the hut of a peasant who, I will wager a thousand against one, does not know how to write?"

"Nevertheless look for some, imbecile, and if you do not find that, well" —

"Well?"

"Well, you will find something else."

"Oh! Fool that I am!" cried Aurilly, striking his fore-

head; "faith, yes, your highness is right, and my head is thick; that is because I am so sleepy, you see, monseigneur."

"Well, well, I will try and believe you; drive away this longing for a while, and since you have not written, I will write myself. Look around, Aurilly, look around, and do not return until you have found something. As for me, I will stay here."

"I will go, monseigneur."

"And if in your searching — wait, if in your searching you find that the house is picturesque in style — You know how I love Flemish interiors, Aurilly!"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, you will call me."

"At once, monseigneur, you may rest assured."

Aurilly arose, and started towards the next room. Aurilly was as light as a bird, and scarcely was there the slighest creaking as he put his foot on the stairs; not a sound betrayed his attempt. At the end of five minutes he returned to his master, who had settled himself, as he said, in the great room.

"Well?" demanded the latter.

"Well, monseigneur, if I may trust to appearances, the house must be devilishly picturesque."

"Why so?"

"The deuce! monseigneur, because we cannot enter it as we please."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that a dragon guards it."

"What is this silly joke, my good fellow?"

"Well, monseigneur, unfortunately it is not a silly joke, but a sad fact. The treasure is on the first floor, in a room behind a door, under which a light is shining."

"Well, after?"

"Monseigneur means before."

"Aurilly!"

"Well, before this door, monseigneur, a man is lying on the threshold, in a great gray cloak."

"Oh! oh! Monsieur du Bouchage takes the liberty of stationing a gendarme at the door of his mistress!"

"He is not a gendarme, monseigneur, but some servant belonging to the lady or the count himself."

"What kind of a servant?"

"Monseigneur, it was impossible to see his face, but what I did see, and clearly, was a large Flemish knife in his belt, on which rested a strong hand."

"This is exciting," said the duke; "waken this fellow for me, Aurilly."

"Oh! the idea! no, monseigneur!"

"What is that you say?"

"I say that without counting what might happen to me in regard to the Flemish knife, I do not want to amuse myself by making mortal enemies of the Joyeuses, who hold a rather good position at court. If we were king of the Netherlands — well let that pass: but we have only to be gracious, monseigneur, especially with those who have saved us; and the Joyeuses have done this. Take care, monseigneur, if you do not acknowledge this, they will."

"You are right, Aurilly," said the duke, stamping his foot, "always right, and yet" —

"Yes, I understand; and yet your highness has not seen the face of a single woman for fifteen mortal days. I do not speak of the kind of animal which peoples the polders; that does not deserve the name of man or woman; it is male and female, that is all."

"I wish to see the mistress of Du Bouchage, Aurilly. I wish to see her; do you understand?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I understand."

"Well! answer, then."

"Well, monseigneur, I will answer that you may perhaps see her, but not through the door, at least."

"Very well," said the prince, "if I cannot see her through the door, I will see her through the window."

"Ah! that is an idea, monseigneur; and to prove that I consider it excellent, I will find a ladder for you."

Aurilly slipped into the court-yard, and ran against the post of a shed, in which the gendarmes had sheltered their horses. After some investigation, he found what almost always can be found in a shed; that is, a ladder. He manœuvred it through the midst of men and animals skilfully enough to avoid waking the former or receiving kicks from the latter, and applied it to the outside wall, from the street.

One must be prince and royally scornful of vulgar scruples, as despots by divine right usually are, to dare, in the presence of the sentinel walking back and forth before the door which

confined the prisoners, to attempt an act as audaciously insulting to Du Bouchage as that which the prince was about to undertake. Aurilly understood this, and called the attention of the prince to the sentinel, who, not knowing who the two men were, was about to cry out: "Who goes there?"

Francis shrugged his shoulders, and went straight to the soldier.

Aurilly followed.

"My friend," said the prince, "this place is the most elevated point of the town, is it not?"

"Yes, monseigneur," said the sentinel, who, recognizing Francis, gave him the salute of honor; "and were it not for those lime-trees, which hide the view, by the light of the moon we could see a part of the country."

"I thought as much," said the prince; "so I had this ladder brought that I might look around. Mount it, Aurilly, or no, let me mount it. A prince should see everything for himself."

"Where shall I place the ladder, monseigneur?" asked the hypocritical servant.

"Oh! anywhere; against that wall, for instance."

The ladder in position, the duke mounted it.

Whether he suspected the scheme, or because he was naturally discreet, the sentinel looked away. The prince reached the top of the ladder. Aurilly stood at the foot.

The chamber which Henry had set apart for Diana was covered with matting, and furnished with a great oak bed, with serge curtains, a table, and a few chairs.

The young woman, whose heart seemed relieved of an enormous weight since the false rumor she had heard in the camp of the gendarmes of Aunis concerning the death of the prince, had asked Rémy for a little food. The latter had brought it up quickly and with indescribable delight. Then, for the first time since she had heard of the death of her father, Diana had tasted more substantial food than bread; for the first time she had drank a few drops of Rhine wine which the gendarmes had found in the cellar and had brought to Du Bouchage.

After this meal, light as it was, Diana's blood, heated by so many violent emotions and unexpected fatigues, rushed more impetuously to her head, the road to which it seemed to have forgotten; Rémy saw her eyes grow heavy and her head drop over her shoulder. He discreetly withdrew, and as we have seen, lay down in front of the door; not because he felt the

slightest mistrust, but because he had done so ever since they had left Paris.

It was after this arrangement, which assured tranquillity for the night, that Aurilly had gone upstairs and had found Rémy lying across the hall.

Diana, on her side, was sleeping with her elbow on the table, her head in her hand. Her supple and delicate body was turned to one side in a long low chair; the small iron lamp on the table, near the half empty plate, lighted the room which at first glance seemed so calm, yet in which there had just been extinguished a tempest which was soon to break forth anew.

The wine, scarcely touched by Diana, glowed in the crystal as pure as a liquid diamond. The tall glass, in the shape of a chalice, stood between the lamp and Diana, and softened the light still more, and the complexion of the sleeper's face.

With closed eyes, eyelids veiled in azure, lips half-parted, hair thrown back above the hood of the man's coarse clothes she wore, Diana must have seemed like a sublime vision to the eyes about to violate the secret of her retreat.

On perceiving her the duke could not restrain an exclamation of admiration; he leaned on the ledge of the window, and devoured the smallest details of her ideal beauty. But suddenly in the midst of his contemplation he frowned, and descended two rounds of the ladder in nervous haste.

In that position he was not exposed to the bright light of the window, which he had seemed to avoid; he leaned against the wall, crossed his arms on his breast, and meditated.

Aurilly, who had not lost sight of him, could see him, his eyes staring into space like those of a man who calls to mind his earliest and most fleeting memories.

After standing ten minutes dreamy and motionless, the duke went up again to the window, again stared through its panes, but apparently could not succeed in finding out what he wanted to know, for the same shadow rested on his brow and the same uncertainty in his glance. He was at this point when Aurilly hastily approached the foot of the ladder.

"Quick, quick, monseigneur, come down," said he, "I hear footsteps at the end of the next street."

But instead of following this advice the duke descended slowly, without coming out of his meditation.

"It was time!" said Aurilly.

"In which direction is the noise?" asked the duke.

"From over there," said Aurilly, pointing toward a dark lane.

The prince listened.

"I hear nothing," said he.

"The person must have stopped; it is some spy watching us."

"Take down the ladder," said the prince.

Aurilly obeyed. Meanwhile the prince sat down on one of the stone benches which were on either side of the door.

The noise was not repeated and no one appeared at the end of the lane.

Aurilly came back.

"Well, monseigneur," said he, "is she beautiful?"

"Very," replied the prince, gloomily.

"What makes you so sad, then, monseigneur? Did she see you?"

"She is asleep."

"Then what are you thinking about?"

The prince did not reply.

"Dark? Light?" asked Aurilly.

"It is strange, Aurilly," murmured the prince, "but I have seen this woman somewhere."

"You recognized her, then?"

"No, for I cannot connect any name with her face; but the sight of her made my heart beat violently."

Aurilly, thoroughly astonished, looked at the prince, then with a smile, the irony of which he did not take the trouble to hide:

"You see!" said he.

"Well, monsieur, do not laugh, I beg you," replied Francis, coldly, "do you not see that I am suffering?"

"Oh! monseigneur, is it possible?" exclaimed Aurilly.

"Yes, truly, it is just as I say, I do not know what I feel; but," he added gloomily, "I think I was wrong to look at her."

"And yet because of the effect the sight of this woman has had on you, we must find out who she is, monseigneur."

"Certainly we must," said Francis.

"Seach your memory, monseigneur. Did you see her at court?"

"No, I think not."

"In France, Navarre. Flanders?"

"No."

"Perhaps she is a Spaniard."

"I think not."

"An English woman? Some lady belonging to Queen Elizabeth?"

"No, no; she must have been connected more closely with my life. I think I have known her under some terrible circumstances."

"In that case, you will easily recognize her, for, thank God! the life of monseigneur has not known very many of those circumstances of which your highness just spoke."

"You think so?" said Francis, with a funereal smile.

Aurilly bowed.

"Now," said the duke, "I am sufficiently master of myself to analyze my sensations; this woman is beautiful, but beautiful as a dead woman is beautiful; beautiful as a shade; beautiful as the figures one sees in dreams; so it seems to me that it is in a dream I have seen her; and," continued the duke, "I have had two or three frightful dreams in my life, which have left me heartsick. Well! yes, I am sure of it now; it is in one of those dreams that I have seen this woman."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur!" cried Aurilly, "will your highness permit me to say that seldom have I heard you so sadly express your sensitiveness in the matter of sleep; your highness's heart is fortunately tempered so as to struggle with the sharpest steel, and the living hurt it no more than the dead, I hope; but, monseigneur, if I did not feel that we were being watched from the street, I would mount the ladder myself, and make sure, I promise you, of the dream, the shadow, and the shudder of your highness."

"Faith, you are right, Aurilly; get the ladder, put it up, and mount it; what does it matter if we are watched? Do you not belong to me? Look, Aurilly, look."

Aurilly had already started to obey his master when suddenly a hasty step fell on the road, and Henry cried out to the duke:

"Alarm! monseigneur, alarm!"

With a bound Aurilly rejoined the duke.

"You!" said the prince, "you here, count! and why have you left your post?"

"Monseigneur," replied Henry, firmly, "if your highness thinks you should punish me, do so. In the meantime, my duty was to come here, and I have come."

The duke glanced at the window with a meaning smile.

"Your duty, count? Explain yourself," said he.

"Monseigneur, some horsemen have appeared in the direction of the Scheldt. I do not know whether they are friends or foes."

"Many of them?" asked the duke, with anxiety.

"Very many, monseigneur."

"Well, count, no false bravery. You did well to return; have your gendarmes wakened. Let us go along the bank of the river which is less wide, and decamp. This will be our wisest move."

"No doubt, monseigneur, no doubt; but it will be necessary, I think, to inform my brother."

"Two men will suffice for that."

"If two men are enough, monseigneur," said Henry, "I will go with a gendarme."

"No, by Heaven!" said Francis, quickly; "no, Du Bouchage, you must come with us, plague it. At such times we do not separate ourselves from a defender like you."

"Will your highness lead the entire escort?"

"Yes."

"That is well, monseigneur," replied Henry, bowing; "how long before your highness will start?"

"At once, count."

"Ho, there! some one!" cried Henry.

The young ensign came out of the narrow street as if he were only waiting for this command from his chief in order to appear.

Henry gave him his orders, and almost immediately the gendarmes were seen filling the square from every part of the town, and preparing for the departure.

In their midst the duke made a speech to the officers.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the Prince of Orange is pursuing me, it seems, but it is not right for a son of France to be made prisoner without the pretext of a battle like Poitiers, or Pavia. Let us yield, therefore, to the number and retire to Brussels. I am sure of my life and my liberty so long as I remain with you."

Then turning to Aurilly:

"You will stay here," said he; "the woman cannot follow us. Besides, I am sufficiently well acquainted with these Joyeuses to know that this one would not dare to take his mistress with him in my presence. Moreover, we are not going to a ball, and we are undertaking a journey which would wear the lady."

"Where is monseigneur going?"

"To France. I think that my affairs are completely upset here."

"But to what part of France? Does monseigneur think it prudent for him to return to court?"

"No; therefore, to all appearances, I shall stop on the way, at one of my châteaux, at Château Thierry, for instance."

"Your highness is determined?"

"Yes; the Château Thierry suits me in every respect. It is a convenient distance, about twenty-four leagues from Paris. I can watch the De Guises, who are at Soissons half the year."

"So it is to the Château Thierry that you are to take this beautiful stranger. But, monseigneur, perhaps she will not let herself be taken."

"Are you a fool? Since Du Bouchage is accompanying me to Château Thierry, and since she is following Du Bouchage, matters will arrange themselves."

"But she may wish to go somewhere else if she notices that I desire to take her to you."

"It is not to me you will be taking her, but, I tell you again, to the count. Come now! on my honor, one would suppose it was the first time that you had helped me under similar circumstances. Have you money?"

"I have two rolls of gold which your highness gave me on leaving the camp of the polders."

"Go ahead, then! and by every possible means, you understand, bring my unknown beauty to the Château Thierry. Perhaps on looking more closely at her I may recognize her."

"And the valet also?"

"Yes, if he is not in your way."

"But in case he is?"

"Treat him as you would treat a stone on the way; throw him into a ditch."

"Very well, monseigneur."

While these two deadly conspirators were arranging their

plans in the darkness, Henry went up to the first floor and wakened Rémy.

The latter, warned, knocked in a particular way on the door, which was opened almost immediately by the young woman.

Behind Rémy she perceived Du Bouchage.

"Good evening, monsieur," said she, with a smile, to which her face had not long been accustomed.

"Oh! pardon me, madame," the count hastened to say, "I have not come to trouble you, but to bid you good-by."

"Good-by! you are going away, count?"

"Yes, madame, to France."

"You are going to leave us?"

"I am forced to, madame; my first duty is to obey the prince."

"The prince! Is there a prince here?" asked Rémy.

"What prince?" inquired Diana, growing pale.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, who was supposed to be dead, but who was miraculously saved, has joined us."

Diana uttered a terrible cry, and Rémy grew so pale that he seemed to have been suddenly struck by death.

"Tell me again," stammered Diana, "that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou is living, that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou is here."

"If he were not, madame, and if he had not commanded me to follow him, I should have accompanied you as far as the convent, which, you told me, you think of entering."

"Yes, yes," said Rémy, "the convent, madame, the convent."

And he laid his finger on his lips. A nod of the head from Diana told him that she had understood the sign.

"I would have accompanied you the more gladly, madame," continued Henry, "because you may be annoyed by the followers of the prince."

"How so?"

"Everything leads me to suppose that he knows a woman is in this house, and no doubt he considers this woman a friend of mine."

"What makes you think so?"

"Our young ensign saw him raise a ladder against the wall, and look into your window."

"Oh!" cried Diana, "my God! my God!"

"Reassure yourself, madame, the ensign overheard him say to his companion that he did not know you."

"No matter! no matter!" said the young woman, looking at Rémy.

"Just as you wish, madame," said Rémy, arming his features with supreme determination.

"Do not be alarmed, madame," said Henry, "the duke is leaving at once. In a quarter of an hour you will be alone and free. Permit me, therefore, to salute you humbly, and to say to you again that until my last breath, my heart will beat for you and with you. Adieu, madame, adieu!"

The count bowed with as much reverence as if he were before an altar, and then stepped back.

"No! no!" cried Diana, with the wildness of fever; "no, God does not wish this; no! God killed this man, and he could not have brought him back to life; no, no, monsieur, you are mistaken, he is dead!"

At that instant and as if in answer to the agonizing appeal to celestial pity, the voice of the prince rang out in the street.

"Count," said he, "count, you are keeping us waiting."

"You hear him, madame?" said Henry. "For the last time, adieu!"

And pressing Rémy's hand he hastened down the stairs.

Diana approached the window, as nervous as a bird fascinated by the serpent of the Antilles.

She saw the duke on horseback. His face was lighted by the glare of the torches, carried by two gendarmes.

"Oh! he lives, the demon, he lives!" murmured Diana in Rémy's ear, in such a terrible tone that the worthy servant himself was frightened.

"He lives, let us live also. He leaves for France; so be it, Rémy, it is to France that we will go."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

SEDUCTION.

The preparations for the departure of the gendarmes had thrown the town into confusion. When they had gone, the noise of their arms and voices was succeeded by the most profound silence. Rémy let the sounds die away little by little, until they were entirely lost. Then when he thought the

house was completely deserted he descended to the lower room to prepare for his departure and that of Diana.

On pushing open the door of the room he was greatly surprised to see a man seated near the fire, his face turned towards him. This man was evidently waiting for Rémy's departure, although on seeing him he assumed an air of the utmost indifference.

Rémy approached, according to his habit, with a slow, halting step, uncovering his bald forehead like that of an old man bowed down with years.

The one he approached had the light behind him, so that Rémy could not distinguish his features.

"Pardon, monsieur," said he, "I thought I was alone or almost alone here."

"I, too," replied the other; "but I see with pleasure that I am to have company."

"Oh! very sad company, monsieur," Rémy hastened to say, "for with the exception of an invalid young man whom I am taking to France" —

"Ah!" said Aurilly at once, affecting all the interest of a sympathizing bourgeois, "I know what you mean."

"Indeed?" said Rémy.

"Yes; you refer to the young woman."

"What young woman?" cried Rémy, on the defensive.

"There! there! do not get angry, my good friend," replied Aurilly. "I am the steward of the house of Joyeuse; I have joined my young master at his brother's order, and when he left, the count recommended to me a young woman and an old servant, who are about to return to France, after having followed him to Flanders" —

As the man uttered these words he approached Rémy with a smiling and affectionate look. In moving, he had placed himself in the line of a ray from the lamp, so that the light fell on him. Rémy could then see him.

But instead of advancing towards the speaker Rémy stepped back, and a look like one of horror appeared for an instant on his mutilated features.

"You do not reply; one would imagine you were afraid of me?" said Aurilly, with his most smiling look.

"Monsieur," replied Rémy, affecting a broken voice, "pardon a poor old man whom troubles and wounds have made timid and distrustful."

"All the more reason, my friend," replied Aurilly, "for you to accept the aid and support of an honest companion; besides, as I just told you, I come on the part of a master who ought to inspire you with confidence."

"Surely, monsieur."

Rémy withdrew a step.

"You are leaving me?"

"I will consult my mistress; I can take nothing on myself, you understand."

"Oh! that is natural; but allow me to present myself. I can explain my mission in all its details."

"No, no, thanks; madame is perhaps still asleep, and her sleep is sacred to me."

"As you please. Besides, I have nothing further to say except what my master told me to communicate to you."

"To me?"

"To you and the young woman."

"Your master is Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage, is he not?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, monsieur."

When he had closed the door, every appearance of the old man, except the bald front and wrinkled face, at once disappeared, and Rémy mounted the stairs with such haste and with so extraordinary a vigor that the old man who an instant before had appeared to be sixty years of age would not have been thought even twenty-five.

"Madame! madame!" cried Rémy in a startled voice as soon as he saw Diana.

"Well, what is the matter now, Rémy? Has not the duke gone?"

"Yes, madame; but there is a demon here a thousand times worse, a thousand times more to be feared than he; a demon on whom daily, for six years, I have called down the vengeance of Heaven, as you have done on his master, and as you have done on him also, while waiting for mine."

"Aurilly, perhaps?" said Diana.

"Aurilly himself; the infamous wretch is below, forgotten by his infernal accomplice, like a serpent out of its nest."

"Forgotten, you say, Rémy? Oh! you are mistaken; you who know the duke are well aware that he does not leave to chance the task of doing the evil when he can do the evil him-

self. No! no! Rémy, Aurilly has not been forgotten here, he has been left here, and left for some object, believe me."

"Oh, as to him, madame, I will believe anything you wish."

"Does he know me?"

"I think not."

"Did he recognize you?"

"Oh! madame," replied Rémy, with a sad smile, "no one ever recognizes me."

"He guesses who I am, perhaps?"

"No, for he has asked to see you?"

"Rémy, I tell you if he does not recognize me, he suspects me."

"In that case, nothing is more simple," said Rémy, gloomily, "and I thank God for having so clearly pointed out our way to us; the town is deserted, the wretch is alone, as I am alone. I saw a dagger in his belt — I have a knife in mine."

"One moment, Rémy, one moment," said Diana, "I will not dispute with you the life of this wretch, but before killing him we must know what he wants of us, and if in our present situation there is not a way of utilizing the evil he wishes to do to us — How did he pass himself off to you, Rémy?"

"As the steward of Monsieur du Bouchage, madame."

"You see he lies; and he must have some interest in lying. Let us find out what he wants by hiding our intention from him."

"I will act according to your orders, madame."

"What does he want?"

"To accompany you."

"In what capacity?"

"As the steward of the count."

"Tell him that I accept."

"Oh, madame!"

"Add that I am about to go to England, where I have relatives, and yet I hesitate; lie just as he does; to conquer, Rémy, one must at least fight with equal arms."

"He will see you."

"But I have my mask! Besides, I suspect that he knows me, Rémy."

"Then if he knows you he is laying a snare for you."

"The way of avoiding it is to pretend to fall into it."

"But" —

"Come, what do you fear? Do you know anything worse than death?"

"No."

"Well! have you not resolved to die in order to carry out our vow?"

"Yes; but not to die without revenge."

"Rémy, Rémy!" said Diana, with a brilliant glance of savage exultation, "we will avenge ourselves, rest assured, you on the servant, I on the master."

"Very well, so be it, madame, the thing is settled."

"Go down, my friend, go."

Rémy descended, but with hesitation. At sight of Aurilly, in spite of himself the brave young man had felt that nervous shiver full of gloomy terror one experiences at sight of reptiles; he had wished to kill because he was afraid. And yet as he went downstairs again the resolution returned to his soul so firmly tempered that, on opening the door, he determined, notwithstanding the advice of Diana, to question Aurilly, to confound him, and if he discovered he had the evil intentions he suspected, to stab him on the spot.

It was in this way that Rémy understood diplomacy.

Aurilly was waiting for him with impatience; he had opened the window in order to watch every means of escape at a glance.

Rémy entered, armed with an unshaken resolution; so his words were gentle and calm.

"Monsieur," said he, "my mistress cannot accept what you propose."

"Why not?"

"Because you are not the steward of Monsieur du Bouchage."

Aurilly turned pale.

"Who told you this?" he asked.

"The explanation is very simple: on leaving, Monsieur du Bouchage entrusted to my care the lady who is with me, and Monsieur du Bouchage did not say a word about you."

"He did not see me until after he had left you."

"Lies, monsieur, lies!"

Aurilly rose; the aspect of Rémy gave him every appearance of an old man.

"You assume a strange tone, my good man," said he, frowning. "Take care: you are old, I am young; you are weak, I am strong."

Rémy smiled, but said nothing.

"If I intended evil to you or your mistress," continued Aurilly, "I need only raise my hand."

"Oh! Oh!" said Rémy, "possibly I am mistaken, and that it is good you intend her?"

"Without doubt."

"Tell me what you desire, then."

"My friend," said Aurilly, "I desire to make your fortune at once, if you will serve me."

"And if I will not serve you?"

"In that case, since you speak frankly to me, I will answer you with equal frankness; in that case I will kill you."

"Kill me! Ah!" said Rémy, with a gloomy smile.

"Yes, I have full power to do so."

Rémy breathed heavily.

"But for me to serve you," said he, "I must at least know your plans."

"Here they are; you have guessed rightly, my good fellow; I do not belong to Count du Bouchage."

"Ah! to whom, then?"

"To a more powerful lord."

"Be careful; you are going to lie again."

"How so?"

"I do not know many houses above that of De Joyeuse."

"Not even the house of France?"

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Rémy.

"And this is how it pays," added Aurilly, slipping one of the duke's rolls of gold into Rémy's hand.

The latter shuddered at contact with this hand, and withdrew a step.

"You belong to the King?" he asked, with an innocence which would have done credit even to a man more designing than himself.

"No, but to his brother, the Duc d'Anjou."

"Ah! very good; I am the very humble servant of Monsieur le Duc."

"Good."

"But next?"

"Next?"

"Yes, what does monseigneur desire?"

"Monseigneur, my very dear fellow," said Aurilly, approach-

ing Rémy, and trying a second time to slip the gold into his hand, "Monseigneur is in love with your mistress."

"He knows her, then?"

"He has seen her."

"Seen her!" cried Rémy, whose clinched hand went towards the handle of his knife. "When did he see her?"

"This evening."

"Impossible! My mistress has not left her room."

"Well! that is just it; the prince acted like a regular schoolboy, which proves that he is really in love."

"How did he act? Come, tell me."

"He took a ladder, and climbed to the balcony."

"Ah!" cried Rémy, repressing the tumultuous beating of his heart. "Ah! that is what he did?"

"It seems that she is very beautiful," added Aurilly.

"You have not seen her, have you?"

"No, but after all monseigneur told me, I am dying to see her; were it only to judge of the exaggeration which love causes in a sensible mind. So, then, it is settled. You are with us?"

And for the third time Aurilly strove to induce Rémy to accept the gold.

"Certainly I am with you," said Rémy, pushing aside the hand of Aurilly; "but still I must know what my rôle is to be in the events you are planning."

"First tell me if the lady upstairs is the mistress of Du Bouchage or of his brother."

The blood mounted to Rémy's face.

"Neither of the one nor of the other," said he, with constraint; "the lady upstairs has no lover."

"No lover! Why, in that case, she is a morsel for a king; a woman without a lover! By Heaven! monseigneur, we have found the philosopher's stone."

"So," went on Rémy, "Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou is in love with my mistress?"

"Yes."

"And what does he want?"

"He wants to have her at Château Thierry, whither he is repairing by forced marches."

"Upon my soul, it is a very sudden passion."

"Passions come to monseigneur in that way."

"I see only one obstacle to this," said Rémy.

"What is that?"

"The fact that my mistress is about to sail for England."

"The devil! Now this is just where you can be useful to me. Persuade her."

"To do what?"

"To take the opposite road."

"You do not know my mistress, monsieur; she is a woman who carries out her ideas. Besides, it would not be anything for her to go to France instead of London. Once at the Château Thierry do you think she would yield to the desires of the prince?"

"Why not?"

"She does not love the Duc d'Anjou."

"Bah! one always loves a prince of the blood."

"But if he suspected that my mistress was in love with the Count du Bouchage or the Duc de Joyeuse, how could the Duc d'Anjou have had the idea of taking her away from her lover?"

"My good man," said Aurilly, "you have trivial ideas, and I see we are going to have trouble in understanding each other; therefore I will not argue. I preferred gentleness to violence, but if you force me to change my manner, well, so be it, I will change it."

"What will you do?"

"I have told you I have the full consent of the prince. I will kill you in some corner, and will carry off the lady."

"You believe you could do this with impunity?"

"I believe everything my master told me to believe. Come, will you persuade your mistress to come to France?"

"I will try; but I cannot promise anything."

"And when shall I have her answer?"

"As soon as I have gone upstairs and consulted her."

"Very well, go; I will wait for you."

"I will obey, monsieur."

"A final word, my good fellow; you know that I hold your fortune and your life in my hand?"

"I know it."

"That is enough, go; in the meantime I will look after the horses."

"Do not be in too great a hurry."

"Bah! I am sure of the answer. Do princes meet with cruelty from women?"

"It seems to me that sometimes happens."

"Yes," said Aurilly, "but very seldom; go."

While Rémy was upstairs, Aurilly, as if he were certain of the success of his hopes, went to the stable.

"Well?" asked Diana, on perceiving Rémy.

"Well, madame, the duke has seen you."

"And"—

"And he loves you."

"The duke has seen me! The duke loves me!" cried Diana; "why you must be out of your head, Rémy!"

"No, I am telling you what he told me."

"Who told you this?"

"That man Aurilly! that wretch!"

"But if he saw me, he must have recognized me."

"Had the duke recognized you, do you think that Aurilly would dare to appear before you and speak to you of love in the name of the prince? No, the duke did not recognize you."

"You are right, a thousand times right, Rémy. During the past six years so much has passed through his infernal brain that he has forgotten me. Let us follow this man, Rémy."

"Yes, but he will recognize you."

"Why do you assume that he has a longer memory than his master?"

"Oh! because it is to his interest to remember, while it is to the interest of the prince to forget. That the duke, being the evil debauchee, the blind, surfeited villain, and assassin of his loves, that he is, might forget is easy to conceive; if he did not forget, how could he live? But Aurilly will not have forgotten; if he sees your face, he will think he sees an avenging shade, and will denounce you."

"Rémy, I thought I told you I had a mask. I thought you told me you had a knife?"

"That is true, madame," said Rémy, "and I am beginning to believe that God is in league with us to punish these evil men."

Then calling Aurilly from the top of the stair:

"Monsieur," said he, "monsieur!"

"Well?" demanded Aurilly.

"Well! my mistress thanks Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage for having thus provided for her safety, and she accepts with gratitude your kind offer."

"That is well, that is well," said Aurilly; "tell her that the horses are ready."

"Come, madame, come," said Rémy, offering Diana his arm.

Aurilly, lantern in hand, was waiting at the foot of the stairs, eager to see the face of the unknown lady.

"The devil!" he muttered, "she wears a mask. Oh! but between here and the Château Thierry the silk cords shall be worn out — or cut!"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE JOURNEY.

They set out.

Towards Rémy, Aurilly assumed a manner of the most perfect equality, and towards Diana the deepest respect.

But it was easy for Rémy to see that this respect was interested. In short, to hold a woman's stirrup when she mounts and dismounts, to watch each of her movements with solicitude, and never to let the opportunity escape to pick up her glove or to fasten her cloak, is the duty of a lover, a servant, or an inquisitive person.

By touching her glove, Aurilly saw her hand; by fastening her cloak, he looked under her mask; by holding her stirrup, he ran a chance of seeing her face, which the prince, in his confused memories, had not recognized, but which he, Aurilly, with his excellent memory, counted on remembering. But the musician was dealing with a strong party. Rémy claimed his place by the side of his companion, and showed that he was jealous of the attentions of Aurilly. Diana herself, without appearing to suspect the reasons for this kindness, took the part of the one whom Aurilly regarded as an old servant, and whom he wished to relieve of a part of his duty, and she begged Aurilly to let Rémy do what he had to do by himself.

During the long ride, Aurilly was reduced to hope for darkness and rain, and during their halts to wish for the meals.

However, he was disappointed in his expectation; neither rain nor sun made any difference, and the mask remained over the lady's face; as to the meals, they were taken by the young woman in a separate room.

Aurilly understood that although he did not recognize the travellers they recognized him; he strove to look in the keyholes, but the lady always turned her back to the door; he

endeavored to see through the windows, but he found thick curtains before them, or in default of curtains the travellers' cloaks.

Neither questions nor attempts at bribery succeeded with Rémy; the servant said that such was the wish of his mistress and consequently his own.

"But are these precautions taken for me alone?" asked Aurilly.

"No, for every one."

"Yet the Duc d'Anjou saw her; she was not hiding then."

"Chance, pure chance," replied Rémy, "and it is just because, in spite of herself, my mistress was seen by the Duc d'Anjou that she is taking precautions to be seen by no one else."

The days passed. The travellers were drawing near to the journey's end, and, thanks to the care of Rémy and his mistress, the curiosity of Aurilly had been held at bay.

Already Picardy appeared before their eyes.

Aurilly, who for three or four days had tried everything, kindness, sulkiness, little attentions, and almost violence, was beginning to lose patience and the evil instincts of his nature were little by little gaining the ascendancy. One would have said that he felt that a mortal secret was hidden beneath the veil of that woman.

One day he lagged somewhat behind with Rémy and renewed his attempts at seduction, which, as usual, Rémy repulsed.

"Well," said Aurilly, "some day or other I will see your mistress."

"No doubt," said Rémy, "but it will be when she wishes, and not when you wish."

"But if I should resort to violence?" said Aurilly.

A flash which he could not restrain shot from Rémy's eyes.

"Try!" said he.

Aurilly saw the flash, and realized the energy there was in the one he took for an old man.

He began to laugh.

"What a fool I am!" said he; "what difference does it make to me who she is? She is the one, is she not, whom the Duc d'Anjou saw?"

"Certainly."

"And whom he told me to bring to Château Thierry?"

"Yes."

"Well! that is all that is necessary; I am not the one who is in love with her; it is monseigneur, and provided that you do not try to run away, to escape from me"—

"Do we look as though we would do that?" asked Rémy.

"No."

"It is so far from our intention that were you not here we should continue our way to Château Thierry; if the duke desires to see us, we too desire to see him."

"In that case," said Aurilly, "everything agrees wonderfully well."

Then as if he wanted to find out the real motive of Rémy and his companion in not changing their road:

"Does your mistress want to stop here a few moments?" said he, pointing to an inn by the wayside.

"You know," said Rémy, "that my mistress stops only in cities."

"I have noticed that," said Aurilly, "but I did not think much about it."

"Such is the case."

"Well! I have made no vow, so I will stop for an instant; keep on, and I will overtake you."

Aurilly indicated the road to Rémy, dismounted, and approached the host, who came towards him with a great show of respect, as though he knew him.

Rémy rejoined Diana.

"What was he saying to you?" asked the young woman.

"He was expressing his usual desire."

"To see me?"

"Yes."

Diana smiled behind her mask.

"Be careful," said Rémy, "he is furious."

"He shall not see me. I do not wish it, and that means that he cannot do so."

"But once at the Château Thierry, will he not see you without your mask?"

"What difference does it make, if the discovery comes too late for them? Besides, his master did not recognize me."

"No, but the servant will."

"You see that so far neither my voice nor my step have made any impression on him."

"Never mind, madame," said Rémy, "all these mysteries

which for eight days have existed for Aurilly did not exist for the prince, and did not arouse his curiosity nor awaken his memories; whereas for eight days Aurilly has been seeking, calculating, reckoning. Your face will make an impression on his memory, which is awakened on all these points, and he will recognize you, if he has not already done so."

At that instant they were interrupted by Aurilly, who had taken a cross-road, and having followed them without losing sight of them, suddenly appeared in the hope of catching a few words of their conversation.

The sudden silence which greeted his arrival was a positive proof to him that he was in the way; therefore he followed behind as he had occasionally done.

From that moment Aurilly's plan was determined on. He really mistrusted something, as Rémy had said; but he mistrusted instinctively, for, not for an instant had his mind, floating from conjecture to conjecture, reached the truth.

He could not understand why they hid from him so persistently the face he would surely see sooner or later.

The better to carry out his plan, he seemed from that moment to have completely renounced it, and became the easiest and the merriest companion possible during the remainder of the journey.

Rémy noted this change not without anxiety.

They came to a town where as usual they spent the night.

The following day, under the pretext that the journey was long, they started at daybreak.

At noon they had to stop to rest their horses.

At two o'clock they resumed the journey. They rode until four. A deep forest appeared in the distance; it was that of La Fère. It had the gloomy and mysterious aspect of our northern forests; but this aspect, so imposing to southern natures, which above all else need light and heat, was powerless upon Rémy and Diana, accustomed to the dense woods of Anjou and Sologne.

They merely exchanged a glance as if both understood that it was there that the event was to take place which from the time of their departure had hovered over their heads.

They entered the forest.

It might have been six o'clock in the afternoon. At the end of half an hour's ride, daylight began to wane.

A strong wind tossed the leaves about and carried them to

an immense pond, lost in the shadow of the trees, like a Dead Sea, and which lay along the side of the road stretching out before the travellers.

For two hours the rain, which fell in torrents, had been soaking the clayey soil. Diana, quite sure of her horse and wholly indifferent as to her own safety, let him go as he pleased; Aurilly rode on her right, Rémy on her left.

Aurilly was on the edge of the pond, Rémy in the middle of the road.

No human being appeared under the sombre arch of verdure on the long winding road.

One would have said that the forest was one of those enchanted forests beneath the shadow of which nothing can live, if one had not occasionally heard, issuing from the depths, the hoarse howling of the wolves awakened by the coming of night.

Suddenly Diana felt her saddle, usually adjusted by Rémy, slip and turn; she spoke to Rémy, who jumped from his horse and leaned over to tighten the girths.

Just then Aurilly drew near Diana, who was paying no attention to him, and with the point of his dagger cut the silk cord which held her mask.

Before she guessed what he was doing or had raised her hand to her face, Aurilly lifted the mask and leaned towards her as she bent over towards him.

The eyes of the two met in a terrible glance; no one could have said which was paler and more threatening.

Aurilly felt a cold perspiration cover his forehead, dropped the mask and the dagger, and clasped his hands in agony, crying:

"Heaven and earth! The Lady of Monsoreau!"

"It is a name you shall not repeat!" cried Rémy, seizing him and pulling him from his horse.

Both rolled to the ground. Aurilly stretched out his hand to pick up his dagger.

"No, Aurilly, no," said Rémy, bending over him and placing his knee on his breast, "no, you must stay here."

The final veil which seemed spread over Aurilly's memory seemed to fall away.

"Le Haudouin!" he cried, "I am dead!"

"That is not true, as yet," said Rémy, placing his hand over the mouth of the wretched man, who struggled beneath him, "but it will be very soon!"

And with his right hand he drew his knife from its sheath.

"Now, Aurilly," said he, "you are right, now you are really dead."

The steel disappeared in the throat of the musician, who uttered an inarticulate death-rattle.

Diana, with haggard eyes, but without pity, half turned in her saddle and leaning trembling on the pommel, had not taken her eyes from the terrible scene.

But when she saw the blood spurt along the blade, she fell back and dropped from her horse, as stiff as if she were dead.

Rémy paid no attention to her; at that dreadful moment he searched Aurilly, removed the two rolls of gold from him, attached a stone to the neck of the body, and threw it into the pond. The rain continued to fall in torrents.

"Efface, O my God!" said he, "efface the mark of thy justice, for it has still other guilty ones to strike."

Then he washed his hands in the dark, sleeping water, took Diana, who was still unconscious, in his arms, lifted her on to her horse, and, still supporting her, mounted his own.

Aurilly's horse, frightened by the howling of the wolves, which were approaching as if the scene had called them, disappeared in the woods.

When Diana recovered consciousness, the two travellers, without exchanging a single word, continued their way to Château Thierry.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

HOW KING HENRY III. DID NOT INVITE CRILLON TO BREAKFAST, AND HOW CHICOT INVITED HIMSELF.

The day following the one on which the events we have just related took place in the forest of La Fère, the King of France came out of his bath at about nine o'clock in the morning.

His valet, having rolled him in a blanket of fine wool and sponged him with two pieces of the thick Persian wadding which resembles the fleece of sheep, had given place to the barbers and dressers, who in turn gave place to the perfumers and courtiers.

The latter having at length departed, the King sent for his steward and said that he would take something besides his

WITH HIS RIGHT HAND HE DREW HIS KNIFE FROM ITS SHEATH.

usual broth, as he felt hungry that morning. This good news was instantly circulated through the Louvre, and caused a very real joy there. The flavor of the meats was beginning to issue from the pantries, when Crillon, colonel of the French guards, we may remember, entered his Majesty's chamber to receive orders.

"Faith, my good Crillon," said the King, "watch as much as you please this morning over the safety of my person; but for God's sake do not make me play the King; I am perfectly contented and happy to-day; it seems to me that I do not weigh an ounce, and that I am about to fly away. I am hungry, Crillon, do you understand this, my friend?"

"I understand it much better, sire," replied the colonel of the French guards, "as I am very hungry myself."

"Oh! you, Crillon!" said the King, laughing; "you are always hungry."

"Not always, sire; oh! no, your Majesty exaggerates; only three times a day; and your Majesty?"

"I? Oh! once a year, and also when I have received good news."

"*Harnibieu!* it seems, then, that you have received good news, sire? So much the better, so much the better! for good news comes rarer and rarer, it seems to me."

"Not at all, Crillon; but you know the proverb?"

"Ah! yes, 'no news, good news.' I do not believe in proverbs, sire, and especially in that one. Has nothing come to you from Navarre?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No; which proves that they are asleep."

"And from Flanders?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? which proves that they are fighting. And from Paris?"

"Nothing."

"Which proves that they are hatching plots."

"Or children, Crillon; speaking of children, Crillon, I think that I am going to have one."

"You, sire!" cried Crillon, in amazement.

"Yes; the queen dreamed last night that she was pregnant."

"Well, sire," said Crillon.

"Well! what?"

"It makes me as happy as possible to know that your Majesty is hungry so early in the morning. Adieu, sire!"

"Go, my good Crillon, go."

"*Harnibieu!* sire," said Crillon, "since your Majesty is so hungry you ought to ask me to breakfast."

"Why, Crillon?"

"Because they say your Majesty lives on the air of the times, which makes you thin, because the air is bad, and because I should be delighted to be able to say: '*Harnibieu!* those are pure calumnies, the King eats like every one else.'"

"No, Crillon, no; on the contrary, let them think as they do; it makes me blush to eat before my subjects like an ordinary mortal. So, Crillon, understand this: a king should always be poetic, and appear only noble. Thus, let us take an example."

"I am listening, sire."

"You remember King Alexander?"

"What King Alexander?"

"Alexander Magnus. Ah! you do not understand Latin, it is true. Well! Alexander loved to bathe before his soldiers because he was beautiful, well formed, and sufficiently plump for them to compare him to Apollo, and even to Antinous."

"Oh! oh!" said Crillon, "you would be devilishly wrong to do as he did and bathe before yours, for you are very thin, my poor sire."

"Go, my good Crillon," said Henry, tapping him on the shoulder. "You are a very excellent brute. You do not flatter me. You are no courtier, my old friend."

"That is because you do not invite me to breakfast," said Crillon, laughing good naturedly, and taking leave of the King, more satisfied than otherwise, for the tap on his shoulder had offset the absent breakfast. Crillon left, and the table was immediately set.

The royal steward had surpassed himself. A certain partridge stew, with a purée of truffles and chestnuts, first attracted the attention of the King, whom some fine oysters had already tempted.

So the usual broth, the faithful comforter of the monarch, was neglected; in vain it raised its great eyes from its gold bowl; its begging eyes, as Theophilus would say, received absolutely nothing from his Majesty. The King began an attack on his partridge stew.

He had reached the fourth mouthful when a light step fell on the floor behind him, a chair creaked on its rollers, and a well-known voice exclaimed sharply :

"A plate!"

The King turned.

"Chicot!" he cried.

"In person."

And Chicot, resuming his habits, which no absence could make him forget, stretched himself in his chair, took a plate and fork, turned to the oysters, sprinkled them with lemon, and chose the largest and the fattest of them, without adding a single word.

"You here! you back again!" cried Henry.

"Hush!" said Chicot with his hand. His mouth was full.

He took advantage of this exclamation of the King to draw the partridge towards him.

"Stop, Chicot, that is my dish!" exclaimed Henry, putting out his hand to retain the stew.

Chicot divided with his prince in a brotherly way, and returned the half to him.

Then he poured out some wine, passed from the stew to a tunny-fish pâté, from that to stuffed crawfish, swallowed for form's sake, and on top of all the rest, the royal broth. Then with a great sigh :

"I am no longer hungry," said he.

"Good Heavens! I should hope not, Chicot."

"Ah! — good morning, my King, how are you? You seem rather lively this morning."

"Don't I, Chicot?"

"You have a charming color."

"Eh?"

"Is it your own?"

"Indeed!"

"In that case, I congratulate you."

"The fact is I feel particularly well this morning."

"So much the better, my King, so much the better. Ah! but is your breakfast over? Are there not still some little dainties?"

"Here are some cherries preserved by the ladies of Montmartre."

"Those are too sweet."

"Nuts stuffed with raisins."

"Fie! they have left the stones in them!"

"Nothing satisfies you."

"Because, on my word, everything is degenerating, even the kitchen, and they live worse and worse at your court."

"Do they live better at the court of the King of Navarre?" asked Henry, laughing.

"Oh, well — I would not deny it."

"Then they must have made great changes there."

"Ah! as to that, you do not know how truly you speak, Henriquet."

"Tell me a little about your trip; it will amuse me."

"Very gladly. I came for that. Where do you want me to begin?"

"At the beginning. What kind of a journey did you have?"

"Oh! a regular stroll."

"You met with no obstacle on the way?"

"It was a fairy-like trip."

"No unfortunate encounters?"

"Come now! Would any one be allowed to look askance at an ambassador of his very Christian Majesty? You calumniate your subjects, my son."

"I said so," replied the King, flattered by the calm which was reigning in his kingdom; "because having no official character nor prominent position, you might have run a risk."

"I tell you, Henriquet, that you have the most delightful kingdom in the world; travellers are provided for free of charge, they are lodged for the love of God; they walk only on flowers, and even the ruts in the road are carpeted with velvet fringed with gold; it may seem incredible, but so it is."

"Then you were pleased, Chicot?"

"Charmed."

"Yes. My police force is good."

"Wonderful! It is only justice to say that."

"And the road is safe?"

"As that of Paradise; you meet on it only little angels, singing the praises of the King as they pass."

"Chicot, we are getting back to Virgil."

"To what part of Virgil?"

"To the Bucolics. *O fortunatos nimium!*"

"Very good, but why this exception in favor of the ploughmen, my son?"

"Alas! because it is not the same in the cities."

"The fact is, Henry, that the cities are a centre of corruption."

"You ought to know; you travelled five hundred leagues without hindrance."

"On rollers as I told you."

"Now, I went only to Vincennes, three-quarters of a mile" —

"Well?"

"Well, I came near being assassinated on the way."

"Bah!" exclaimed Chicot.

"I will tell you about it, my friend. I am going to have the affair published in detail; had it not been for my Forty-Five I would have been killed."

"Indeed! And where did it happen?"

"You mean where was it to have happened?"

"Yes."

"At Bel Esbat."

"Near the convent of our friend Gorenflot?"

"Exactly."

"And how did our friend act under the circumstances?"

"Wonderfully, as always, Chicot. I do not know whether he had heard any rumor of it, but instead of snoring, as all my lazy monks generally do at that hour, he was standing on his balcony, while the whole convent were holding the road."

"And he did nothing else?"

"Who?"

"Dom Modeste?"

"He blessed me with a dignity which belongs only to him, Chicot."

"And his monks?"

"They shouted with all their might: 'Long live the King!'"

"And you noticed nothing else?"

"What else?"

"That they carried arms under their gowns?"

"They were armed with all sorts of weapons, Chicot; in that, I recognized the foresight of the worthy prior; that is why I say that that man knew everything, and yet he said nothing, asked for nothing; he did not come the next day, as D'Épernon did, to search in all my pockets, and say: 'Sire, for having saved the King!'"

"Oh! he would be incapable of that; besides, his hands could not get into your pockets."

"Chicot, no joking about Dom Modeste; he is one of the very great men who will make my reign famous; and I declare to you that the first opportunity I have I will give him a bishopric."

"You will do very well, my King."

"Note one thing, Chicot," said the King, assuming his impressive manner, "when they come from the ranks, men of talent are perfect. We noblemen, you see, inherit certain virtues and vices which make us historical specialties. Thus, the Valois are sly and subtle, brave, but idle; the Lorraines are ambitious and greedy, with ideas, intrigue, and movement; the Bourbons are sensual and circumspect, but without ideas, without strength, without will, — take Henry, for instance; when Nature, on the other hand, all at once moulds a man born with nothing, she uses only her finest clay; so your Gorenflot is perfect."

"You think so?"

"Yes, learned, modest, crafty, and brave; one could make anything of him, a minister, a general, or a pope."

"There! there! sire, stop," said Chicot; "if the good man were to hear you, he would burst his skin, for he is very proud, whatever you may say of him, this prior Don Modeste."

"You are jealous, Chicot!"

"I! God forbid! Jealousy! fie! the villanous passion!"

"Oh, I am just, noble blood does not blind me, *stemmata quid faciunt?*"

"Bravo! and you say, my King, that you came near being assassinated?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By the League, great Heavens!"

"How is the League?"

"Just the same."

"Which means better and better; it is growing fat, Henriquet, it is growing fat."

"Oh! oh! political bodies which grow fat too young do not live; they are like children, Chicot."

"So you are satisfied, my son?"

"Partly."

"You feel yourself in Paradise?"

"Yes, Chicot, and it is a great delight to have you come back in the midst of my happiness; I anticipate an increase of joy by it."

"*Habemus consulem factum!* as Cato said."

"You bring good news, do you not, my son?"

"I think so."

"And you keep me waiting for it, nice fellow that you are."

"Where do you want me to begin, my King?"

"I have already told you — at the beginning; but you always wander from the subject."

"Must I start from the day I left?"

"No, the trip was good, you told me, did you not?"

"You see that I have apparently returned whole."

"Yes; let me hear about your arrival in Navarre."

"I agree to that."

"What was Henry doing when you arrived?"

"Making love."

"To Margot?"

"Oh! no."

"That would have surprised me. He is still faithless to his wife, then? The rascal! faithless to a daughter of France! Fortunately, she pays him back. Well, when you arrived, what was the name of Margot's rival?"

"Fosseuse."

"A Montmorency! Come, that is not bad for this Béarnais bear. There was talk here of a peasant, a gardener's daughter, a bourgeois."

"Oh! all that is old."

"So Margot is deceived?"

"As much as a woman can be."

"And she is furious?"

"Enraged."

"And she avenges herself?"

"She certainly does."

Henry clapped his hands with unparalleled joy.

"What is she going to do?" cried he, laughing; "will she move heaven and earth, hurl Spain at Navarre, Artois and Flanders at Spain? Will she call her little brother Henriquet against her little husband Henriot, hey?"

"It is possible."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"And when you left, what was she doing?"

"Oh! as to that, you would never guess."

"She was preparing to take another lover?"

"She was preparing to be *sage-femme*."[1]

"What? What does that sentence mean, or rather that anti-French inversion? It is equivocal, Chicot; beware of equivocation!"

"No, my King, no. The deuce! We are too much of a grammarian to be guilty of equivocation, too delicate to talk nonsense, and too truthful ever to have meant to say *femme sage*.[2] No, no, my King, I said *sage-femme*."

"*Obstetrix?*"

"*Obstetrix*, yes, my King; *Juno Lucina*, if you prefer."

"Monsieur Chicot!"

"Oh! roll your eyes as much as you please, I tell you that when I left Nérac your sister Margot was about to have a confinement case."

"On her own account?" cried Henry, growing pale; "Margot is to have children?"

"No, no, on her husband's account; you well know that the last Valois have not the prolific virtue; they are not like the Bourbons, the deuce!"

"So Margot is about to deliver actively" —

"Everything there is most active."

"Whom is she" —

"Mademoiselle Fosseuse."

"Faith, I do not understand," said the King.

"Nor I, either," said Chicot; "but I did not pledge myself to make you understand. I promised to tell you the facts, that was all."

"But perhaps she consented to this humiliation very unwillingly?"

"Certainly, there was a struggle; but in every struggle there is inferiority on the part of one or the other. Take Hercules with Anteus, or Jacob with the angel. Well, your sister has been weaker than Henry, that is all."

"By Heaven, I am glad, in truth!"

"Wicked brother!"

"They must hate each other, then?"

"I think that at heart they do not adore each other."

"But apparently?"

[1] Midwife.

[2] A wise woman.

"They are the best friends in the world, Henry."

"Yes; but some fine morning a new love will arise which will completely embroil them."

"Well! this new love has come, Henry."

"Bah!"

"Yes, on my honor; but shall I tell you what I fear?"

"Yes."

"I fear that this new love, instead of embroiling them, will bring them nearer together."

"So there is a new love?"

"Ah! my God, yes."

"Of the Béarnais?"

"Of the Béarnais."

"For whom?"

"Wait a minute; you want to know everything, do you not?"

"Yes, let me know, Chicot, let me know; you tell a story very well."

"Thanks, my son; but if you want to know everything I must begin again at the beginning."

"Well, begin again, but do it quickly."

"You wrote a letter to the fierce Béarnais."

"How do you know that?"

"By Heaven! I read it."

"What do you say to it?"

"That although the tenor of it was not delicate, it was at least astute in language."

"It ought to have caused trouble between them."

"Yes, if Henry and Margot were an ordinary bourgeois couple."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Béarnais is not a beast."

"Oh!"

"And that he guessed."

"Guessed what?"

"That you wished to cause trouble between him and his wife."

"That was evident."

"Yes, but what was less so was the reason you had for wishing to embroil them."

"Ah! the devil! the reason" —

"Yes, this cursed Béarnais took it into his head that by

making trouble between him and his wife, you had no other object than not to pay your sister the dowry you owe her!"

"Oh!"

"My God, yes, that is the idea this devil of a Béarnais got into his head."

"Continue, Chicot, continue," said the King.

"Well, scarcely had he guessed that, before he became as you are now, sad and melancholy."

"Afterwards, Chicot, afterwards?"

"Then that was a diversion to his distraction, and he almost stopped loving Fosseuse."

"Bah!"

"It is as I tell you; he was seized by this other love which I mentioned."

"But is the man a Persian, a pagan, a Turk? Does he practise polygamy? And what did Margot say?"

"This time, my son, you will be surprised, but Margot was delighted."

"At Fosseuse's accident, I can imagine it."

"No, no, delighted on her own account."

"Does she like the profession of midwife?"

"Ah! this time she will not be midwife."

"What will she be?"

"She will be godmother, her husband has promised her, and the sugar-plums are even now on their way."

"In any case he will not buy them with her dowry."

"You think so, my King?"

"Certainly, since I have refused him this dowry. But what is the name of the new mistress?"

"Oh! she is beautiful, and strong, and wears a magnificent girdle; moreover, she is quite capable of withstanding an attack."

"She defended herself?"

"Yes, by Heaven!"

"So that Henry was repulsed with loss?"

"At first."

"Ah! ah! and afterwards?"

"Henry is obstinate; he returned to the charge."

"So that" —

"So that he took her."

"How?"

"By force."

"By force?"

"Yes, with petards."

"What in the devil do you mean, Chicot?"

"The truth."

"Petards! And who is this beauty who can be taken with petards?"

"She is Mademoiselle Cahors."

"Mademoiselle Cahors?"

"Yes, a large, beautiful girl, faith, whom they called a maiden like Péronne. She has one foot on the plain, the other on the mountain, and her tutor is, or rather was, Monsieur de Vesin, a brave gentleman of your acquaintance."

"By Heavens!" cried Henry, enraged; "my town! he has taken my town!"

"Well! you grasp the idea, Henriquet. You were unwilling to give it to him after having promised it; so he had to make up his mind to take it. But, by the way, wait, here is a letter which he charged me to give into your own hands."

Chicot drew a letter from his pocket and presented it to the King.

It was the one Henry had written after the taking of Cahors, and which concluded with these words:

"*Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum; cognosco meos devotos; nosce tuos; Chicotus cætera expediet.*"

Which meant:

"That which you have told me has been very useful to me; I know my friends; know yours; Chicot will tell you the rest."

CHAPTER LXXX.

HOW AFTER HAVING RECEIVED NEWS FROM THE SOUTH HENRY RECEIVED MORE FROM THE NORTH.

The King, at the highest pitch of exasperation, could scarcely read the letter which Chicot had just given him.

While he was deciphering the Latin of the Béarnais with ejaculations of impatience which made the floor shake, Chicot, standing before a long Venetian mirror hung above a gilded dresser, was admiring his looks and the infinite grace of his figure in his uniform.

Infinite is the word, for never had Chicot appeared so tall; his somewhat bald head was surmounted by a conic helmet, in the style of the German headpieces that are chiselled so curiously at Trèves and Mayenne. He was occupied for the time being in replacing over his buff coat, smeared by perspiration and the rubbing of his armor, a demi-cuirass for travelling, which he had put on over his coat for breakfast. Moreover, while buckling his cuirass, his spurs, which were better adapted for disembowelling than for urging on a horse, clanked on the floor.

"Oh! I am betrayed," cried Henry, when he had finished reading the letter, "the Béarnais had a plan and I never suspected it."

"My son," replied Chicot, "you know the proverb: 'Still waters run deep!'"

"Go to hell with your proverbs!"

Chicot started towards the door as if to obey.

"No, remain."

Chicot stopped.

"Cahors taken!" continued Henry.

"And well taken too," said Chicot.

"But then he has generals and engineers."

"No," said Chicot, "the Béarnais is too poor; how would he pay them? No, indeed, he does everything himself."

"And — he fights?" said Henry, somewhat disdainfully.

"To say that, at first, he throws himself into the battle with enthusiasm, I should not dare; he is like those people who test the water before bathing; he wets the tips of his fingers with a little perspiration, which argues ill, prepares his breast with several *mea culpa*, his forehead with philosophical reflections; this takes up the ten minutes which follow the first cannon-shot, after which he rushes headlong into action, and like a salamander fairly swims in molten lead."

"The devil!" said Henry, "the devil!"

"And I assure, you, Henry, it was hot there."

The King rose hastily, and paced the room with long strides.

"This is a blow to me!" he cried, finishing aloud the thought begun within himself. "They will laugh over it. I shall be lampooned. These rogues of Gascons are caustic; I can already hear them sharpening their teeth and their smiles over the horrible airs of their bagpipes. By Heaven! fortunately I had the idea of sending to Francis the help so long

desired. Antwerp will compensate me for the loss of Cahors; the north will efface the blunders of the south."

"Amen!" said Chicot, delicately inserting the tips of his fingers into the sweetmeats of the King, in order to finish his dessert.

Just then the door opened, and the usher announced:

"Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage!"

"Ah!" cried Henry, "I told you so, Chicot, here is my news. Come in, count, come in."

The usher opened the door, and there appeared within its frame, beneath the half-drawn curtain, the young man who had just been announced. He looked like a full length portrait of Holbein or Titian. He advanced slowly, and bent his knee in the middle of the room.

"Still pale," said the King, "still gloomy. Come, my friend, for the time being, don your holiday expression, and do not tell me good news with such a downcast countenance; speak quickly, Du Bouchage, because I am hungry for your story. You come from Flanders, my son?"

"Yes, sire."

"And in haste, I see."

"Sire, as quickly as a man can cover the ground."

"You are welcome. Antwerp? What about Antwerp?"

"Antwerp belongs to the Prince of Orange."

"To the Prince of Orange! What do you mean?"

"To William, if you like that better."

"Ah! but did not my brother march on Antwerp?"

"Yes, sire, but he no longer marches on Antwerp; he is now hastening to Château Thierry."

"He has left the army?"

"There is no longer an army, sire."

"Oh!" said the King, his knees giving way, as he fell back into his armchair, "but Joyeuse?"

"Sire, my brother, after doing wonders with his marines, after covering the whole retreat, rallied the few men escaped from the disaster and made of them an escort for the Duc d'Anjou."

"A defeat!" murmured the King.

Then suddenly, with a strange flash in his eye:

"Then Flanders is lost to my brother?"

"Absolutely, sire."

"Without recall?"

"I fear so."

The forehead of the prince cleared gradually, as if under the influence of a bright thought.

"That poor Francis," said he, smiling; "he has bad luck with his crowns. He failed to get that of Navarre; he stretched his hand towards that of England; he touched that of Flanders; but we will wager, Du Bouchage, that he will never reign. Poor brother, he has so long desired it!"

"Oh, heavens! that is always the way when any one wants a thing," said Chicot, solemnly.

"How many prisoners?" asked the King.

"Almost two thousand."

"How many dead?"

"At least as many; Monsieur de Saint Aignan is among the number."

"So he is dead, that poor Saint Aignan?"

"Drowned."

"Drowned! What! you were thrown into the Scheldt?"

"Not at all; the Scheldt was thrown upon us."

The count then gave the King an exact description of the battle and of the flood. Henry listened from beginning to end with an attitude, a silence, and a face which were not lacking in majesty. Then, when the recital was finished, he rose, and kneeling down before the *priedieu* of his oratory, made his prayer. A minute afterwards he returned, with a perfectly serene countenance.

"There!" said he, "I hope that I take things like a king. A king supported by the Lord is really more than human. Come, count, imitate me, and since your brother as well as mine has been saved, thank God, and let us smile a little."

"I am at your orders, sire."

"What do you wish as the price of your services, Du Bouchage? Speak."

"Sire," said the young man, shaking his head, "I have rendered no services."

"I dispute that, but at all events your brother has rendered some."

"Immense services, sire."

"He has saved the army, you say, or rather the wreck of the army?"

"Among those who remain there is not a single man who will not tell you that he owes his life to my brother."

"Well, Du Bouchage, I desire to extend my favors to you both, and in this I shall imitate the all-powerful Savior who has so clearly protected you by making you alike, that is, rich, brave, and beautiful; moreover, I shall imitate the great politicians always so happily inspired, who were in the habit of rewarding the bearers of bad news."

"Come, now!" said Chicot. "I know instances of messengers hanged for bringing bad news."

"That is possible," said Henry, majestically; "but the senate thanked Varro."

"You cite republicans. Valois, Valois, misfortune makes you humble."

"Come, Du Bouchage, what do you want? What do you desire?"

"Since your Majesty does me the honor of speaking so affectionately to me, I shall venture to take advantage of your kindness. I am tired of life, sire, and yet I have scruples about shortening my life, for God forbids this. All the subterfuges that an honorable man employs in such a case are wicked; men let themselves be killed in battle; allow themselves to die of hunger; forget to swim when they are crossing a river; all these are travesties of suicide through which God sees quite readily, for you know, sire, our most secret thoughts are as clear as day to God. I give up, then, dying before the limit that God has appointed for my life, but the world wearies me, and I would withdraw from it."

"My friend!" said the King.

Chicot raised his head and looked with interest at this young man, so beautiful, so brave, so rich, yet who spoke in such despairing tones.

"Sire," continued the count, resolutely, "all that has happened for some time has strengthened in me this desire. I wish to throw myself into the arms of God, the sovereign consoler of the wretched, as he is likewise the sovereign master of the happy ones on earth. Deign then, sire, to make the way easy or to provide the means for me to enter at once into a religious life, for, as the prophet says, my heart is as heavy as death."

Chicot, that mocking individual, stopped for an instant the incessant play of his arms and features to listen to this lofty grief which spoke so nobly, so sincerely, in the sweetest, most persuasive voice that God ever gave to youth and beauty.

His eye darkened as it met the despairing glance of the brother of Joyeuse. His entire body was relaxed, and yielded in sympathy to this misery which did not seem to have weakened but to have severed every fibre of the body of Du Bouchage.

The King also had felt his heart melt on hearing this sad request.

"Ah! I understand, my friend," said he, "you wish to enter a religious life, but you still feel yourself a man and you fear the trials."

"I do not fear the severe discipline, but the time of probation. No, no, it is not in order to soften the hardships which will be imposed on me, for I hope to spare my body no physical suffering, my mind no moral privation. I wish to take away from both all pretext of returning to the past. In a word, to raise at once the grating which shall separate me forever from the world, and which according to ecclesiastic rules ordinarily rises as slowly as a hedge of thorns.

"Poor boy!" said the King, who had followed the statement of Du Bouchage by scanning, so to speak, each of his words, "poor boy! I think that he will make a good preacher; don't you, Chicot?"

Chicot was silent, and answered nothing.

"You understand, sire, it is in my family that the struggle will occur; it is among my relatives that I shall find the strongest opposition. My brother the cardinal, a good man although worldly, will seek a thousand reasons to make me change my mind, and if he should not succeed in persuading me, as I am sure he will not, he will resort to material impossibilities, and will incite Rome against me, who raises obstacles between each degree of orders. In this your Majesty is all-powerful; in this I shall appreciate the strength of the arm which your Majesty is good enough to raise above me. You asked what I wished, sire; you promised to grant my request. My desire, you see, is all in God; prevail upon Rome to let me dispense with my novitiate."

The King roused himself from his meditation, and with a smile took the count's hand.

"I will do what you ask, my son," said he. "You wish to serve God; you are right; he is a better master than I."

"A fine compliment you are paying him!" murmured Chicot between his teeth.

"Well! so be it," said the King; "you shall be ordained according to your desires, dear count, I promise you."

"Your Majesty overwhelms me with joy!" cried the young man, kissing Henry's hand with as much pleasure as if he had been made duke, peer, or marshal of France. "So the affair is settled?"

"On my word as King, and on my honor as a gentleman," said Henry.

The face of Du Bouchage brightened; something like a smile of ecstasy passed over his lips; he saluted the King respectfully and withdrew.

"There is a happy, a very happy young man!" exclaimed Henry.

"Good!" said Chicot; "but you have nothing to envy him, it seems to me; he is no more to be pitied than you, sire."

"But you understand, Chicot, you understand he is going to be a monk, he is going to give himself to God."

"Well, what the devil prevents your doing the same? He asks a dispensation from his brother the cardinal; but I know a cardinal who will give you all the dispensation necessary; he stands better at Rome than you do. You do not know him? He is the Cardinal de Guise."

"Chicot!"

"And if the tonsure troubles you, and it is a delicate operation, the prettiest hands in the world, and the prettiest scissors of the Rue de la Coutellerie, golden scissors, faith, will give you this precious symbol which will raise to the figure three the number of crowns you shall have worn, and which will justify the motto: "*Manet ultima cœlo.*"

"Pretty hands, you say?"

"Come, now, are you going to say evil of the hands of the Duchess of Montpensier, after having said it of her shoulders? What a king you make, and how severe you are to your subjects!"

The King frowned, and passed across his brow a hand more trembling, to be sure, but as white as those to which Chicot had referred.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "let us leave all this, for I see that the conversation is beginning to weary you; let us return to things which interest me personally."

The King made a gesture half indifferent, half approving. Chicot looked about him, and tipped back his chair on its hind legs.

"Well," said he, in a low voice, "tell me, my son; did these Joyeuses leave *like that* for Flanders?"

"What do you mean by *like that?*"

"I mean that they are so eager, the one for pleasure, the other for sadness, that it seems to me surprising that they should have left Paris without making any noise, the one to amuse himself, the other to divert his thoughts."

"Well?"

"Well! as you are the best of friends, you ought to know how they went away."

"Certainly I know."

"Then tell me, Henriquet, have you heard it said" —

Chicot paused.

"What?"

"That they fought any one of importance, for instance?"

"I have not heard."

"Did they abduct any woman with violence and pistols?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did they chance to burn anything?"

"What?"

"How do I know what? A great lord burns the house of a poor devil for amusement, for instance."

"Are you mad, Chicot? Burn a house in my city of Paris? Would any one dare to do such a thing?"

"Ah! yes, they do not stand on ceremony."

"Chicot!"

"In short, have they done nothing to cause you to hear noise or see smoke?"

"Faith, no."

"So much the better!" said Chicot, breathing with an ease which he had not felt since he had begun the questioning to which he had just subjected Henry.

"Do you know one thing, Chicot?" said Henry.

"No."

"You are becoming wicked."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"My sojourn in the tomb sweetened me, great King, but your presence *sours* me. *Omnia letho putrescunt.*"

"That is to say, I am mouldy?" asked the King.

"Somewhat, my son, somewhat."

"You are becoming insupportable, Chicot; and I attribute

to you projects of intrigue and ambition which I thought far from your character."

"Ambitious plans, I! Chicot ambitious! Henriquet, my son, you used to be only simple, but you are growing foolish. You are progressing."

"And I tell you, Monsieur Chicot, that you want to entice all my servants away from me, by attributing them with intentions which they have not, with crimes of which they have not thought; I say that you wish to monopolize me, in short!"

"Monopolize you! I!" cried Chicot. "Monopolize you! For what reason? God keep me from it, for you are too troublesome, *bone Deus!* Without counting the fact that you are as hard to please in regard to food as the devil — Oh! no, no, the idea!"

"Humph!" said the King.

"Come, tell me where you got such a strange notion?"

"You began by listening very indifferently to my praises of your old friend Dom Modeste, to whom you owe a great deal."

"I? I owe a great deal to Dom Modeste? Good, good, good! and afterwards?"

"Afterwards you tried to calumniate my Joyeuses, two very true friends."

"I do not deny it."

"Then you laid your heavy claw on the De Guises."

"Ah! you love them too, just now, do you? This is one of your days for loving every one, apparently."

"No, I do not love them; but as at present they keep themselves quiet, and hidden; as just now they are not doing me the least harm; as I do not lose sight of them for an instant; as I always notice in them the same coldness; and as I am not in the habit of being afraid of statues, threatening as they may be, I keep to those whose faces and attitudes I know. You see, Chicot, a phantom, when it has become familiar, is an insufferable companion. All these De Guises with their wild looks and their long swords are people of my kingdom who, up to the present time, have done me very little wrong; and they resemble — shall I tell you what?"

"Yes, Henriquet, it will please me; you well know that you are full of subtleties in your comparisons."

"They resemble the perches that are left in the ponds to chase away the big fish and prevent them from getting too fat; but suppose for an instant that the big fish are not afraid."

"Well?"

"They have not teeth enough to bite into their scales."

"Oh, Henry, my son, how subtle you are!"

"While your Béarnais" —

"Come, have you a comparison for the Béarnais, too?"

"While your Béarnais, who mews like a cat, bites like a tiger" —

"On my life!" exclaimed Chicot, "here is a Valois who lies in wait for a De Guise! Come, come, my son, you have too good a start to stop. Divorce your wife at once and marry Madame de Montpensier; at least you will have a chance with her, for if you do not give her children, she will give you some; was she not once in love with you?"

Henry drew himself up.

"Yes," said he, "but I was otherwise occupied; there lies the source of all my threats. Chicot, you have put your finger on the spot; she has a woman's spite against me, and now and then sets me on edge, but fortunately I am a man, and I have but to laugh."

Henry uttered these words as he pulled up his collar, turned down in the Italian style, when the usher, Nambu, announced from the doorway:

"A messenger for his Majesty from the Duc de Guise."

"Is he a courier or a gentleman?" asked the King.

"He is a captain, sire."

"By my faith! let him come in, and he shall be welcome."

At the same time a captain of gendarmes entered, wearing the campaign uniform, and gave the customary salute.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE TWO COMRADES.

At this announcement, Chicot sat down and, according to his habit, impertinently turned his back to the door. With his eyes half veiled, he buried himself in one of those meditations which were so habitual to him, when the first words uttered by the messenger from the De Guises caused him to start. Consequently he opened his eyes. Fortunately, or

unfortunately, the King, occupied with the newcomer, paid no attention to this show of fright on the part of Chicot.

The messenger stood ten feet from the armchair in which Chicot had disappeared, and as Chicot's profile scarcely rose above the ornaments of the chair, Chicot saw the messenger perfectly, while the messenger could see only Chicot's eye.

"You come from Lorraine?" asked the King of the messenger, whose figure was dignified and whose bearing quite warlike.

"No, sire, but from Soissons, where Monsieur le Duc, who has not left the city for a month, gave me this letter, which I have the honor of laying at your Majesty's feet."

Chicot's eyes sparkled, and did not lose a gesture of the newcomer, as his ears did not lose a word.

The messenger opened his buff coat fastened with silver clasps, and drew from a leather bag, which was lined with silk, and worn over his heart, not one letter, but two, for one dragged the other out with it, being attached to it by the wax of its seal, so that as the captain drew out one, the other dropped on the carpet.

Chicot's eye followed the fall of this letter as the eye of a cat follows the flight of a bird. As it fell he saw the color mount to the cheeks of the messenger, and his embarrassment as he picked it up as well as when he handed the first one to the King.

But Henry saw nothing; Henry, a model of confidence, paid no attention to anything. He merely opened the letter that had been handed to him and read.

Seeing the King absorbed in reading, the messenger gazed intently at him, striving to find on his face the reflection of every thought which the letter might rouse in his mind.

"Ah! Maître Borromée, Maître Borromée!" murmured Chicot, following each movement of Monsieur de Guise's confidant. "Ah! you are a captain, and you give only one letter to the King when you have two letters in your pocket; just wait, my darling, wait."

"That is good, very good!" said the King, re-reading every line of the duke's letter with evident satisfaction; "you may go, captain, and say to Monsieur de Guise that I appreciate the offer he makes me."

"Will not your Majesty honor me with a written answer?" asked the messenger.

"No; I will send one in a month or six weeks, when I will thank him myself. Go!"

The captain bowed and left the apartment.

"You see, Chicot," said the King to his companion, whom he still thought in the depths of his armchair, "you see clearly that Monsieur de Guise is innocent of all machination. The brave duke has heard about the Navarre affair. He fears the Huguenots will grow bold and raise their heads, for he has learned that the Germans already wish to send aid to the King of Navarre. Now, what does he do? Guess what he does."

Chicot did not answer. Henry thought he was waiting for an explanation.

"Well," he continued, "he offers me the army which he has just raised in Lorraine to watch over Flanders, and he tells me that in six weeks this army, with its general, will be entirely at my disposal. What do you say to that, Chicot?"

Absolute silence on the part of the Gascon.

"Truly, my dear Chicot," continued the King, "you are so absurd, my friend; you are as obstinate as a Spanish mule, and if one is unfortunate enough to convince you of a mistake, which often happens, you sulk. Well, yes, you sulk, like the fool that you are."

Not a breath contradicted Henry in the statement which he had just uttered so frankly concerning his friend.

There was something which displeased Henry still more than this obstinacy; it was the silence.

"I think," said he, "that the fellow has had the impertinence to fall asleep. Chicot!" he continued, advancing towards the armchair, "your King is speaking to you; will you answer him?"

But Chicot could not answer, for he was no longer there. Henry found the chair empty.

His eyes searched the entire room; the Gascon was there no more than in the chair.

His helmet had disappeared with him.

The King was seized with a sort of superstitious terror; the thought sometimes passed through his mind that Chicot was superhuman, some diabolic incarnation, — kind it is true, but diabolic.

He summoned Nambu. Nambu had nothing in common with Henry. He was strong-minded, on the contrary, as is

generally the case with those who guard the antechambers of kings. He believed in appearances and disappearances; he had seen many of them, but it was the appearances and disappearances of the living, not of the dead.

Nambu positively assured his Majesty that he had seen Chicot leave five minutes before the messenger from Monsieur le Duc de Guise had gone out. But he had left quietly and with the precaution of a man who does not wish to be seen.

"Evidently," said Henry, passing into his oratory, "Chicot is angry at having been in the wrong. How petty men are, my God! I say this about all of them, even the most spiritual."

Maître Nambu was right. Chicot, his helmet on his head, and stiffened by his long sword, had passed noiselessly through the antechamber; but his precaution had failed to keep his spurs from striking on the stairs which led from the apartments to the gate of the Louvre; the sound caused many to turn round, and cost Chicot many bows, for they knew Chicot's position with the King, and gave him a lower bow than they would have given the Duc d'Anjou.

In an angle of the gate, Chicot stopped to fasten a spur.

The captain of Monsieur de Guise, as we have said, had left scarcely five minutes after Chicot, to whom he had paid no attention. He descended the steps and crossed the court, at once proud and delighted; proud because on the whole he was not a bad-looking soldier, and it pleased him to parade his grace before the Swiss and the guards of his very Christian Majesty; delighted because the King had received him in a manner which showed that he had no suspicion of Monsieur de Guise. As he passed through the gate of the Louvre, and crossed the drawbridge, he was attracted by the clanking of spurs which seemed to be the echo of his own. He turned, thinking that perhaps the King had sent some one after him. Great was his surprise on recognizing, under the turned up points of his helmet, the kindly face and demure features of the bourgeois Robert Briquet, his cursed acquaintance.

It may be remembered that the feeling of the two men for each other was not precisely one of sympathy.

Borromée opened his mouth half a foot wide, as Rabelais said, and thinking that the man behind wished to speak to him, he stopped, so that in two strides Chicot overtook him.

We know what Chicot's strides were.

"*Corbœuf!*" exclaimed Borromée.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot.

"My gentle bourgeois!"

"My reverend father!"

"In this helmet!"

"In this buff coat!"

"It is delightful to see you!"

"It is a satisfaction to have met you!"

And the two bullies looked at each other for several seconds with the hostile hesitation of two cocks about to fight, and which, to intimidate each other, rise on their spurs.

Borromée was the first to change from grave to gay. The muscles of his face relaxed, and with an air of warlike frankness and amiable suavity:

"Great God!" said he, "you are a sly dog, Maître Robert Briquet."

"I, reverend father?" replied Chicot. "Why do you call me that, please?"

"Because at the convent of the Jacobins you gave me to understand that you were only a simple bourgeois. In truth, you must be ten times more cunning and brave than a lawyer and a captain together."

Chicot felt that the compliment came from the lips and not from the heart.

"Ah! ah!" replied he, good-humoredly, "and what must we say of you, Seigneur Borromée?"

"Of me?"

"Yes, of you."

"Why?"

"For making me believe that you were only a monk. In truth, you must be ten times more cunning than the pope himself; and, comrade, I do not underrate you by saying this, for the pope is, believe me, a fierce inventor of intrigue, nowadays."

"Do you believe what you say?" asked Borromée.

"*Ventre de biche!* Do I ever lie?"

"Well, touch this."

And he extended his hand to Chicot.

"Ah! you abused me at the convent, brother captain," said Chicot.

"I took you for a bourgeois, my dear fellow, and you know the feeling we swordsmen have for bourgeois."

"That is true," said Chicot, laughing, "it is like monks, and yet you have caught me in a snare."

"A snare?"

"Yes; for in this disguise you laid a snare. A brave captain like you does not exchange his cuirass for a frock without a good reason."

"From a swordsman," said Borromée, "I will have no secrets. Well, yes; I have certain personal interests in the convent of the Jacobins; and you?"

"I too," said Chicot; "but hush!"

"Let us talk a little about it, will you?"

"Upon my soul, I am trying to do so."

"Do you like good wine?"

"Yes, when it is good."

"Well, I know a small inn, which I consider unrivalled in Paris."

"And I know one also," said Chicot. "What is the name of yours?"

"*La Corne d'Abondance.*"

"Ah! ah!" cried Chicot, with a start.

"Well! what is the matter now?"

"Nothing."

"Have you anything against this inn?"

"No; quite the contrary."

"You know it?"

"Not at all; and I wonder at this."

"Would you care to go there with me, comrade?"

"Why, yes, at once."

"Come, then."

"Where is it?"

"Near the Porte Bourdelle. The host is an old wine-bibber who understands perfectly the difference between the palate of a man like you and the throat of a thirsty passer-by."

"Can we converse there at our ease?"

"In the cellar, if we wish."

"And without being disturbed?"

"We will close the door."

"Well," said Chicot, "I see that you are a man of resource, and as well known in inns as in convents."

"Do you suppose I have an understanding with the host?"

"It looks so."

"Faith, no; this time you are wrong. Maître Bonhomet

sends me wine when I wish, and I pay him when I can; that is all."

"Bonhomet?" said Chicot. "On my word, that is a promising name."

"And one which holds. Come, comrade, come."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot to himself, following the false monk. "Now, you will have to choose among your best grimaces, friend Chicot; for if Bonhomet recognizes you immediately, it is all over with you, and you are nothing but a fool."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

LA CORNE D'ABONDANCE.

The road along which Borromée led Chicot, without suspecting that the latter knew it as well as he himself, recalled to our Gascon the happy days of his youth.

How many times, with head empty, limbs supple, and arms hanging down or swinging, as the admirable popular slang says, how many times had Chicot, beneath a ray of winter sunlight or in the fresh shade of summer, sought this house of *La Corne d'Abondance*, to which a stranger was now leading him.

Then, some pieces of gold, and even silver, jingling in his purse made him happier than a king; he gave himself up to the pleasing delight of idling, as much as seemed good to him, to him who had neither mistress nor lodging, neither a child starving at the door nor suspicious and scolding parents behind the window.

Then Chicot would seat himself carelessly on the wooden bench or stool of the inn to wait for Gorenflot; or rather he would find Gorenflot waiting for him, punctual to the first fumes of the repast.

Then Gorenflot's eye would grow animated, and Chicot, always intelligent and observing, always the anatomist, would study each phase of his friend's intoxication, pondering on that curious nature through the subtle vapor of a reasonable emotion; and under the influence of good wine, warmth, and liberty, youth would mount to his brain, splendid, victorious, and full of consolation.

As he passed before the Bussy cross-roads Chicot raised himself on his toes to try and see the house which he had entrusted to the care of Rémy, but the street was winding, and to stop would not have been good policy. Therefore, with a sigh, he followed Captain Borromée.

Before long the great street of Saint Jacques appeared before him, then the monastery of Saint Benoît, and almost opposite the latter, the inn of the *Corne d'Abondance*. The latter was somewhat aged, somewhat rusty, somewhat cracked; but was still shaded by plantains and chestnut trees on the outside, and within, furnished with bright pewter pots and saucepans, shining imitations of gold and silver for drinkers and gourmands, which drew the real gold and silver into the pocket of the inn-keeper by sympathetic rays, for which nature alone was responsible.

After glancing from the doorway to the house Chicot bent his back so that he lost six inches of his height, which was already lessened in the presence of the captain, assumed a satirical grimace very different from his frank expression and the honest play of his features, and prepared to face his ancient host, Maître Bonhomet. But, as Borromée went ahead in order to show the way, at sight of the two helmets Maître Bonhomet troubled only to look at the first. If the façade of the *Corne d'Abondance* was cracked, the face of the worthy innkeeper, also, had suffered the ravages of time. Besides the wrinkles, which on the human countenance correspond to the cracks caused by time on the front of monuments, Maître Bonhomet had assumed an air of importance, which to every one except swordsmen rendered him difficult of approach, and which hardened his face.

Now, Bonhomet always respected the sword; it was his weakness. He had contracted the habit in a quarter removed from all municipal surveillance, under the influence of peaceful Benedictine monks.

In short, if a quarrel chanced to arise in this glorious inn, before one could have reached the counterscarp in search of the Swiss or the archers of the watch, the sword would already have acted, and in such a way as to puncture several doublets. Bonhomet had been responsible for this mischief seven or eight times, and each time it had cost him a hundred pounds. He respected the sword, therefore, in accordance with the principle that fear creates respect. As to the other patrons of the

Corne d'Abondance, students, clerks, monks, and merchants, Bonhomet managed them without assistance. He had acquired a certain celebrity in putting a large wooden bucket on the heads of the reluctant or dishonest payers, and this act always kept at his side certain pillars of the inn whom he had chosen from among the strongest men of the neighboring shops.

For the rest, they knew the wine was pure and good, and each man had the right to bring it from the cellar himself; they well knew the forbearance of the host in regard to certain matters of credit, and no one murmured at his fantastic whims.

These whims were attributed by some old patrons to the great trouble in Maître Bonhomet's own household. Such at least was the explanation which Borromée thought he should give to Chicot as to the character of the host, whose hospitality they were about to enjoy together.

The misanthropy of Bonhomet had had an unfortunate result on the decoration and comfort of the inn. In short the innkeeper, thinking himself far above his patrons, gave no care to the embellishment of his tavern. The result was that on entering the room Chicot recognized it at once. Nothing was changed except the smoky hue of the ceiling which from gray had turned to black.

In those happy days the inns had not yet contracted the strong, heavy odor of burned tobacco with which the wainscoting and the draperies of rooms are impregnated nowadays; an odor which is absorbed and exhaled by everything which is porous and spongy.

The result of this was that in spite of its venerable dirt and its dilapidated appearance the room of the *Corne d'Abondance* did not annoy by extraneous odors. The fumes of wine had penetrated every nook of the establishment, so that, if we may be permitted to say so, a true drinker found pleasure in this temple of the god Bacchus, for it breathed forth the aroma and incense dearest to the god. Chicot walked behind Borromée, as we have said, and was neither seen nor recognized by the host of the *Corne d'Abondance*.

He knew the darkest corner of the living room, and he started to take possession of it as though he had known no other, when Borromée suddenly stopped him.

"Very fine, my friend!" said he, "but there is a little corner behind this partition in which two men can secretly and

honestly converse after drinking, and even while they are drinking."

"Come on," said Chicot.

Borromée made a sign to the host which meant:

"Comrade, is the small room vacant?"

Bonhomet replied by another sign which meant:

"It is."

Borromée led Chicot, who pretended to run against every corner of the hall, to the little room so well known to those of our readers who have been kind enough to waste their time reading *La Dame de Monsoreau.*

"There!" said Borromée, "wait for me here while I take advantage of a privilege given to the frequenters of this inn, and which you will enjoy when you are better known."

"What is that?" asked Chicot.

"To go myself to the cellar and choose the wine which we are going to drink."

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot; "a pleasant privilege. Go."

Borromée disappeared.

Chicot's eyes followed him; then, as soon as the door was closed, he raised from the wall a representation of the Assassination of Credit, murdered by poor payers.

This picture was framed in black wood, and made a companion piece to another, representing a dozen poor wretches pulling the devil by the tail.

Behind this there was a hole through which one could see into the large room without being seen.

Chicot knew this hole, for it was of his own making.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "you are leading me to an inn of which you are a constant frequenter; you bring me into a corner in which you think I cannot be seen, and from which you think I cannot see, and in this corner is a hole, thanks to which you will not make a gesture without my seeing it. Come, come, my captain, you are not over bright."

As he uttered these words with his usual air of scorn, Chicot put his eye to the aperture, artistically bored through a defect of the wood.

Through this hole he perceived Borromée first put his finger cautiously on his lips, then speak to Bonhomet, who apparently acquiesced in his wishes by a nod of his Olympian head.

At the movement of the captain's lips, Chicot, an expert in such matters, guessed that the words uttered by him meant:

"Serve us in this little room, and whatever noise you hear do not enter."

After this Borromée took a lamp which was always burning on a table, raised a trap-door, and descended to the cellar, taking advantage of the most precious privilege accorded to the patrons of the inn.

Chicot immediately gave his peculiar knock on the wall.

On hearing the sound, which must have recalled some memory deeply hidden in his heart, Bonhomet trembled, looked around, and listened.

Chicot knocked a second time like a man who wonders why his first knock was not obeyed.

Bonhomet hastened to the little room and found Chicot standing, a threatening look on his face.

At sight of him Bonhomet gave a cry; like every one he had supposed Chicot dead, and so thought he stood face to face with his ghost.

"My good fellow, why and since when do you force men of my quality to knock twice?"

"Oh! dear Monsieur Chicot," said Bonhomet, "is it you or only your spirit?"

"Whether it is I or my spirit," said Chicot, "now that you recognize me, my good man, I hope you will obey me in every particular."

"Oh! certainly, my dear lord, give your orders."

"Whatever noise you may hear in this room, Maître Bonhomet, and whatever takes place here, I hope you will wait until I call before you come."

"That will be very easy, dear Monsieur Chicot, as it is just what your companion has asked me to do."

"Yes, but I am the one who will call, you understand; if he should call let it be as though you had heard nothing."

"That is settled, Monsieur Chicot."

"Very good; and now, under some pretext or other, send away your other clients so that in ten minutes we may be as free and as much by ourselves as if we had come to hold a feast on Good Friday."

"In ten minutes, my lord Chicot, there shall not be a soul in the whole inn except your humble servant."

"Go, Bonhomet, go. You have retained all my esteem," said Chicot, majestically.

"Oh! my God! my God!" said Bonhomet, withdrawing. "What is going to happen in my poor house?"

As he went out he met Borromée returning from the cellar with his bottles.

"You understand?" said the latter; "in ten minutes not a soul must be in this inn."

Bonhomet, usually so scornful, nodded in sign of obedience, and retired to his kitchen, in order to consider a means of fulfilling the double injunction of his two formidable customers.

Borromée entered the small room and found Chicot waiting for him, a smile on his lips.

We are ignorant of how Maître Bonhomet managed; but at the end of ten minutes the last student had crossed the threshold, giving his arm to the last clerk and saying:

"Oh! oh! the day is stormy at Maître Bonhomet's; let us decamp, or beware the hail."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SMALL ROOM OF MAÎTRE BONHOMET'S INN.

As the captain entered the small room with a basket of a dozen bottles in his hand, Chicot received him in so open and smiling a manner that Borromée was tempted to look on him as a simpleton. Borromée hastened to uncork the bottles which he had brought from the cellar; but his haste was nothing to Chicot's. So the preparations did not take long. The two companions, like experienced drinkers, sent for some salty food, with the laudable object of preventing their thirst from slacking. These relishes were brought by Bonhomet, at whom each drinker glanced. Bonhomet replied to each look; but if any one had been able to judge of those two glances, he would have found a great difference between the one given to Borromée and that given to Chicot.

Bonhomet withdrew and the two companions began to drink. At first, as if the occupation was too important to be interrupted,

the two drinkers swallowed a goodly number of bumpers without exchanging a single word.

Chicot, especially, was wonderful; without having said anything but "Faith, this is fine Burgundy!" and "On my soul, you are an excellent fellow!" he had swallowed two bottles; that is, one bottle for each remark.

"By Heaven!" murmured Borromée, aside, "it is strange, my meeting such a drinker."

At the third bottle Chicot raised his eyes to Heaven.

"Truly," said he, "we are drinking hard enough to become intoxicated."

"Good! this sausage is so salt!" said Borromée.

"Ah! that pleases you," said Chicot; "let us continue, my friend; I have a strong head."

And each again emptied his bottle.

The wine produced an entirely different effect on the two companions. It loosened the tongue of Chicot, and tied that of Borromée.

"Ah!" murmured Chicot, "you are silent, my friend; you distrust yourself."

"Ah!" said Borromée, in a low tone, "you brag, so you are getting tipsy. How many bottles does it take, comrade?" asked Borromée.

"For what?" asked Chicot.

"To become gay?"

"I reckon on four."

"And to get tipsy?"

"Say six."

"And to get drunk?"

"Let us double the number."

"A Gascon!" thought Borromée; "he is beginning to stammer and he is only at the fourth bottle. In that case we have a margin," said he, drawing from the basket a fifth bottle for himself and a fifth for Chicot.

But Chicot noticed that some of the five bottles ranged at Borromée's right were half empty, others three-quarters, but that not one was wholly empty. This confirmed the idea which had first come to him that the captain had evil intentions regarding him.

He rose to take the fifth bottle which Borromée held out to him, and swayed on his legs.

"Good!" said he; "you felt it?"

"What?"

"The shock of an earthquake."

"Bah!"

"Yes, *ventre de biche!* Fortunately the inn of the *Corne d'Abondance* is solid, although built on a pivot."

"What! built on a pivot?" said Borromée.

"Certainly, since it turns around."

"That is so," said Borromée, emptying his glass to the last drop; "I felt the effect, but did not know the cause."

"Because you are not a Latin scholar," said Chicot; "because you have not read the treatise *De Naturâ Rerum.* If you had read this you would know that there is no effect without a cause."

"Well, my dear comrade," said Borromée, "for, like me, you are a captain, are you not?"

"A captain from the tips of my toes to the top of my head," replied Chicot.

"Well, my dear captain," said Borromée, "tell me, since as you say there is no effect without a cause, tell me what was the cause of your disguise?"

"Of what disguise?"

"Of the one you wore when you came to Dom Modeste."

"How was I disguised?"

"As a bourgeois."

"Ah! that is so."

"Tell me this and you will begin my education in philosophy."

"Willingly; but you will tell me, in turn, will you not, why you were disguised as a monk? Confidence for confidence."

"Agreed!" said Borromée.

"Take this," said Chicot, and he held out his hand to the captain.

The latter grasped Chicot's hand heavily.

"My turn now," said Chicot.

And he touched Borromée's hand.

"Good!" said the latter.

"You want to know why I was disguised as a bourgeois?" asked Chicot, with a tongue which was growing thicker and thicker.

"Yes, that puzzles me."

"And you will tell me in your turn?"

"On my faith as a captain; is it not settled?"

"That is true, I had forgotten. Well, it is very easy to understand."

"Tell me, then."

"In two words you will know the whole story."

"I am listening."

"I was spying for the King."

"You were spying?"

"Yes."

"You are a spy by profession?"

"No, merely in an amateur way."

"What were you spying at Dom Modeste's?"

"Everything. In the first place I was spying Dom Modeste; then Brother Borromée; then little Jacques; then the entire convent."

"And what did you discover, my worthy friend?"

"First I discovered that Dom Modeste is a big fool."

"It was not necessary to be clever for that."

"Pardon! pardon! His Majesty Henry III., who is no fool, looks upon him as the light of the Church, and is thinking of making him a bishop."

"Be it so, I have nothing to say against such a promotion; on the contrary, I shall laugh heartily that day. And what further did you discover?"

"I discovered that Brother Borromée was not a monk, but a captain."

"Ah, indeed! you discovered that?"

"At first glance."

"And next?"

"I discovered that little Jacques was practising with foils while waiting for the time to come when he should fence with the sword, and that he was aiming at a target until time for him to aim at a man."

"Ah! you discovered that!" said Borromée, frowning. "And next, what more did you discover?"

"Oh! give me some wine; otherwise I can remember nothing more."

"You notice that you are beginning on the sixth bottle," said Borromée, laughing.

"And I am getting tipsy," said Chicot; "I do not pretend otherwise; but did we come here to philosophize?"

"We came here to drink."

"Let us drink, then!"

And Chicot filled his glass.

"Well!" said Borromée, when he had approved of Chicot.

"Do you remember?"

"What?"

"What else you saw in the convent?"

"I should think so!" exclaimed Chicot.

"Well! what did you see?"

"I saw that the monks, instead of being priests, were old soldiers, and that instead of obeying Dom Modeste they were obeying you. That is what I saw."

"Indeed! But probably that was not all?"

"No; but wine, wine, wine, or my memory will fail me."

And as Chicot's bottle was empty, he held out his glass to Borromée, who filled it from his own.

Chicot emptied his glass without taking breath.

"Well! do we remember?" asked Borromée.

"Do we remember! I should think so!"

"What further did you see?"

"I saw that there was a plot on hand."

"A plot!" cried Borromée, turning pale.

"Yes, a plot," said Chicot.

"Against whom?"

"Against the King."

"With what object?"

"With the object of abducting him."

"When?"

"When he returned from Vincennes."

"Thunder!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Nothing. So you saw that?"

"I saw that."

"And you warned the King of it?"

"By Heaven! since I came for that purpose!"

"In that case, you are the one who caused the failure of the plot?"

"I am the one," said Chicot.

"Murder!" muttered Borromée, between his teeth.

"You say?" demanded Chicot.

"I say that you have good eyes, my friend."

"Bah!" replied Chicot, stammering, "I saw other things, too. Hand me one of your bottles and I will astonish you when I tell you what I saw."

Borromée hastened to comply with Chicot's request.

"Now," said he, "astonish me."

"In the first place," said Chicot, "I saw Monsieur de Mayenne wounded."

"Bah!"

"Yes, I did; I met him on the road. Then I saw Cahors taken."

"What! you saw Cahors taken? You come from Cahors, then?"

"Certainly. Ah! captain, it was a fine sight, in truth, and a brave fellow like you would have been delighted at the spectacle."

"I do not doubt it. You were with the King of Navarre, then?"

"We were side by side, dear friend, as you and I are now."

"And you left him?"

"To announce the news to the King of France."

"And you have just come from the Louvre?"

"A quarter of an hour before you."

"Then as we have not been apart since then, I will not ask you what you have seen since our meeting in the Louvre."

"On the contrary, do ask me; for on my word, that is most interesting of all."

"Tell it, then."

"Tell! tell!" said Chicot; "*ventre de biche;* it is very easy to say 'tell!'"

"Make an effort."

"Another glass to untie my tongue — a full one; good! Well, I saw, comrade, that in taking from your pocket the letter from his highness the Duc de Guise you let fall another."

"Another!" cried Borromée, with a start.

"Yes," said Chicot; "and it is there."

Chicot made two or three attempts with an unsteady hand, and finally placed the tip of his finger on the buff doublet of Borromée, over the spot where the letter was concealed. Borromée shuddered as if Chicot's finger had been a red hot iron which had touched his breast instead of his doublet.

"Oh! oh!" said he; "there is just one thing lacking."

"To what?"

"To all that you have seen."

"What is that?"

"That you know to whom this letter is addressed."

"Oh, I know perfectly well!" said Chicot, resting both arms on the table. "It is addressed to the Duchess of Montpensier."

"Blood of Christ!" cried Borromée, "and you said nothing about this to the King, I hope?"

"Not a word, but I shall."

"When?"

"When I have had a nap," said Chicot.

And he laid his head on his arms, as he had previously rested his arms on the table.

"Ah! you know that I have a letter for the duchess?" said the captain, in a choked voice.

"I know that perfectly," echoed Chicot.

"And if you could stand on your legs, you would go to the Louvre?"

"I should go to the Louvre."

"And you would denounce me?"

"And I should denounce you."

"So that this is not a joke?"

"What?"

"That as soon as your nap is over"—

"Well?"

"The King will know everything."

"Why, my dear friend," said Chicot, raising his head and looking at Borromée with a weary air; "understand the case: You are a conspirator; I a spy. I have so much for each plot I expose. You weave a plot; I denounce you. Each follows his trade, that is all. Good-night, captain."

As he spoke, not only did Chicot resume his first position, but he settled himself on his chair and on the table in such a way that the front of his head was buried in his hands and the rest of it protected by his helmet. The only portion exposed was his back.

And this back, freed from its cuirass, which lay on a chair, was pleasingly rounded.

"Ah!" said Borromée, fixing on his companion a flashing eye, "ah! you will denounce me, dear friend!"

"As soon as I wake, dear friend; that is understood," said Chicot.

"But we shall see if you ever wake!" cried Borromée.

And he dealt a furious blow of the dagger at his companion

of the bottle, thinking he would pierce him through and through and nail him to the table.

But Borromée had counted without the coat of mail which Chicot had borrowed from the armory of Dom Modeste. The dagger broke like glass against the brave metal, which for the second time had saved Chicot's life.

Moreover, before the assassin had recovered from his astonishment, Chicot's right arm, unbending like a spring, described a semi-circle and gave a mighty blow with its fist on the face of Borromée, who rolled against the wall, bloody and bruised.

In an instant he was on his feet; another second and he had his sword in his hand. These two seconds were sufficient for Chicot in turn to rise and unsheath his sword.

All the vapors of the wine were dispelled as if by magic. Chicot stood half thrown back on his left leg, his eye steady, his wrist firm and ready to receive his enemy.

The table, like a battlefield, on which lay the empty bottles, stood between the two adversaries and served as a barricade for each.

But the sight of the blood running down his nose, and from his face to the floor, enraged Borromée, and, losing all prudence, he rushed at his enemy, coming as near to him as the table would allow.

"Brute!" cried Chicot, "you see very well that it is you who are drunk, for you cannot reach from one side of the table to the other, while my arm is six inches longer than your arm and my sword is six inches longer than your sword. This will prove it!"

And Chicot, without even lunging, extended his arm with the rapidity of lightning and touched Borromée in the middle of his forehead. The latter gave a cry, more from rage than pain, and as, all things considered, he was very brave, he redoubled the fury of his attack.

Chicot, still at the other side of the table, took a chair and calmly sat down.

"My God! how stupid these soldiers are!" said he, shrugging his shoulders. "This one pretends to know how to handle a sword, and the most insignificant bourgeois, if he wished, would kill him and his comrades like flies. Well! well! he is going to put my eyes out now. Ah! you are getting on the table; good! that was the only thing lacking. But take care,

beaten ass that you are, upward thrusts are terrible, and if I wanted to I could spit you like a lark."

And he touched Borromée's stomach as he had touched his forehead.

Borromée roared with fury, and jumped from the table.

"Good!" cried Chicot; "now we are on level ground, and can talk as we fence. Ah! captain, captain, we sometimes assassinate like this, in our spare moments between two plots."

"I do for my cause what you do for yours," said Borromée, brought back to serious thoughts, and frightened in spite of himself at the dull fire which burned in Chicot's eyes.

"That is talking," said Chicot, "and yet, friend, I see with pleasure that I am worth more than you. Ah! not bad."

Borromée had just given Chicot a blow which grazed his breast.

"Not bad, but I know the thrust; it is the one you showed to little Jacques. I said then that I was worth more than you, my friend, for I did not begin the fight, however much I might have wished to do so. Moreover, I let you carry out your plan by giving you every latitude, and even now I am simply parrying. This is because I have a compromise to suggest to you."

"Nothing!" cried Borromée, exasperated at Chicot's calmness, "nothing!"

And he made a thrust which would have pierced the Gascon through and through if the latter had not used his long legs and stepped back out of reach of his adversary.

"Still I am going to tell you this plan, so that I may have nothing to reproach myself with."

"Keep still!" said Borromée, "it is useless, keep still!"

"Listen," said Chicot, "it is for my conscience' sake. I am not thirsty for your blood, do you understand? and I wish to kill you only as a last resort."

"Kill me, kill me if you can!" cried Borromée, exasperated.

"No. Once in my life I killed another swordsman like you, I might even say a better swordsman than you. By Heaven! you know him, he too belonged to the house of De Guise, and was a lawyer."

"Ah! Nicolas David!" murmured Borromée, frightened at the knowledge, and putting himself on the defensive.

"Exactly."

"Ah! it was you who killed him?"

"Oh! my God, yes, with a pretty little thrust which I am going to show you, unless you accept the compromise."

"Well! what is your plan; let me hear?"

"You will pass from the service of the Duc de Guise into that of the King, but without leaving that of the Duc de Guise."

"That is, I am to be a spy like yourself?"

"No; there would be a difference. I am not paid and you would be. You will begin by showing me the letter from Monsieur le Duc de Guise to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier. You will let me make a copy of it, and I will leave you in peace until the next time. So, am I kind?"

"Wait," said Borromée, "this is my answer."

Borromée's answer was a blow given so rapidly that the point of the sword grazed Chicot's shoulder.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "I see clearly that it is absolutely necessary for me to show Nicolas David's thrust; it is very simple and pretty."

And Chicot, who, until then, had kept on the defensive, took a step forward and attacked in turn.

"This is it," said Chicot, "I make a feint like this."

He made it. Borromée parried by drawing back; but, after the first step, he was forced to stop, for the wall was behind him.

"Good! that's it, you parry the circle; that is wrong, for my wrist is better than yours. I catch the sword, I return *en tierce haute*, I lunge, you are touched, or rather you are dead."

In short, the thrust had followed, or accompanied, the demonstration, and the slender rapier penetrated the breast of Borromée and glided like a needle between two of his ribs sinking deep and with a dull sound into the wall. Borromée threw out his arm and dropped his sword; his bloody eyes dilated, his lips opened, a red foam appeared on them, his head fell over his shoulder with a sigh which resembled a death-rattle. Then his limbs gave way, and his body, in falling, enlarged the cut made by the sword, but did not detach it from the wall, held as it was by the infernal wrist of Chicot. Thus the unhappy wretch, like a gigantic butterfly, remained nailed to the wall, while his feet jerked noisily.

Chicot, cold and impassible, as he always was in a crisis, especially when in the depths of his heart he had the conviction that he had done everything prescribed by his conscience,

let go of the sword, which remained fixed horizontally, unfastened the captain's belt, and searching his doublet, took out the letter and read the address:

The Duchess of Montpensier.

The blood bubbled from the wound, and suffering and agony were painted on the features of the wounded man.

"I am dying, I am dying," he murmured; "Lord God have pity on me!"

This last appeal to the divine pity, made by a man who probably had never thought of it until this supreme moment, touched Chicot.

"Let us be charitable," said he, "and since this man must die, let him at least die as gently as possible."

Approaching, with an effort he withdrew his sword from the wall, and, supporting Borromée's body, prevented it from falling to the floor.

This last precaution, however, was useless. Death had come quick and cold; it had already paralyzed the members of the conquered man; his limbs bent, he slipped from Chicot's arms, and rolled heavily to the floor.

This shock caused a wave of black blood to spurt from the wound, and with it fled the rest of the life which still animated Borromée.

Then Chicot opened the door and called Bonhomet.

He did not have to call twice.

The innkeeper had listened at the door, and had heard in succession the sound of the tables and stools, the clashing of the swords, and the fall of a heavy body.

But this worthy landlord had too much experience, especially after the confidence which had been placed in him, of the character of swordsmen in general, and of Chicot in particular, not to guess step by step what had taken place.

The only thing he did not know was which of the two adversaries had succumbed.

It must be said in praise of Maître Bonhomet that his face assumed an expression of veritable delight when he heard the voice of Chicot, and when he saw that it was the Gascon safe and sound who opened the door. Chicot, whom nothing escaped, noticed this expression and was inwardly pleased at it.

Bonhomet entered the little room, trembling.

"Ah! good Jesus!" he cried, seeing the body of the captain bathed in blood.

"Well! my God, yes, my poor Bonhomet," said Chicot; "this is how you find us; this dear captain is very ill, as you see."

"Oh! my good Monsieur Chicot, my good Monsieur Chicot!" exclaimed Bonhomet, ready to faint.

"Well, what?" asked Chicot.

"It was wrong of you to choose my inn for this deed! Such a fine-looking captain!"

"Would you prefer to have Chicot on the floor and Borromée standing?"

"No, oh, no!" cried the host from the depths of his heart.

"Well! that is what would have happened without a miracle from Providence."

"Really?"

"Faith of Chicot! Glance at my back a minute; it pains me, dear friend."

And he bent down in front of the innkeeper, so that his two shoulders were on a level with the eyes of the latter.

His doublet was torn between his shoulders, and a round spot of blood as large as a silver crown was reddening the edges of the hole.

"Blood!" exclaimed Bonhomet; "blood! Ah! you are wounded!"

"Wait, wait!"

And Chicot unfastened his doublet and then his shirt.

"Now look," said he.

"Ah! you had a cuirass! What luck, dear Monsieur Chicot; and you say the rogue tried to kill you?"

"Well! it seems to me that I could not have amused myself by thrusting a dagger between my own shoulders. Now what do you see?"

"A broken link."

"He went to work in earnest, this dear captain, — and blood?"

"Yes, a good deal of blood under the coat of mail."

"Let us take it off, then," said Chicot.

He removed it, and exposed a back which seemed made only of bones, muscles over the bones, and skin over the muscles.

"Ah, Monsieur Chicot!" cried Bonhomet; "it is as large as a plate."

"Yes, that is it; extravasated blood. There is ecchymosis, as the physicians say. Get me some white linen, pour an

equal quantity of good olive oil and wine dregs into a glass, and wash this spot, my friend, wash it."

"But this dead body, dear Monsieur Chicot, this body; what am I to do with it?"

"That does not concern you."

"What! that does not concern me?"

"No; give me some ink, pens, and paper."

"At once, dear Monsieur Chicot."

Bonhomet hurried from the room.

Meanwhile Chicot, who probably had no time to lose, heated in the lamp the point of a small knife, and cut the wax seal of the letter. After this, nothing further held the despatch, and Chicot drew it from its envelope and read it with a lively feeling of satisfaction.

As he finished, Maître Bonhomet returned with the oil, the wine, some paper, and pens.

Chicot placed the pen, ink, and paper before him, seated himself at the table, and stoically gave his back to Bonhomet.

Bonhomet understood the pantomime, and began his bathing.

But as if, instead of being irritated by a painful wound, he were being voluptuously tickled, Chicot, during this time, copied the letter from the Duc de Guise to his sister, and made his comments on each word. The letter was as follows:

"Dear Sister: The expedition to Antwerp succeeded for every one else, but failed for us. You will be told that the Duc d'Anjou is dead; but do not believe this, for he lives.

"He lives, do you understand? Therein lies the whole point. There is an entire dynasty in these words; they separate the house of Lorraine from the throne of France more than the deepest abyss would do.

"But do not be too anxious on that score. I have discovered that two persons, whom I thought dead, are still living, and there is a great chance of death for the prince in the lives of these two persons.

"Think, therefore, only of Paris. In six weeks it will be time for the League to act. Let the Leaguers know that the time approaches, and that they must be ready.

"The army is on foot; we count on twelve thousand men, reliable and well equipped. I shall enter Flanders with them under the pretext of fighting the German Huguenots who are carrying aid to Henry of Navarre. I will defeat the Huguenots, enter France in a friendly way, and act as master."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot.

"Am I hurting you, dear monsieur?" said Bonhomet, pausing in his rubbing.

"Yes, my good fellow."

"I will work more gently, I promise you."

Chicot continued:

"*P.S. I fully approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five. But permit me to say to you, dear sister, that you will do those fellows more honor than they deserve*" —

"Ah! the devil!" murmured Chicot; "this is becoming obscure."

And he re-read:

"*I fully approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five.*"

"What plan?" said Chicot to himself.

"*But permit me to say to you, dear sister, that you will do those fellows more honor than they deserve.*"

"What honor?"

Chicot resumed:

"*Than they deserve.*

"*Your affectionate brother,*

"*H. DE LORRAINE.*"

"Well," said Chicot, "everything is clear except the post-script. Good! We will watch that."

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," ventured Bonhomet, seeing that Chicot had stopped writing, if not thinking, "dear Monsieur Chicot, you have not told me what I am to do with this body."

"The affair is very simple."

"Yes, for you who are full of imagination, but for me?"

"Well! suppose, for instance, that this unfortunate captain had become engaged in a quarrel in the street with some Swiss or horse soldiers, and that he was brought to you wounded, would you have refused to receive him?"

"No, certainly not, unless you had forbidden me to do so, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"Suppose that, laid in this corner, he passed from life to death in spite of the care you gave him. It would be unfortunate, nothing more, would it not?"

"Certainly."

"And instead of incurring reproaches, you would deserve praise for your kindness. Suppose, moreover, that in dying,

this poor captain had uttered the well-known name of the Prior of the Jacobins, Saint Antoine."

"Dom Modeste Gorenflot?" cried Bonhomet, in astonishment.

"Yes, Dom Modeste Gorenflot. Well! you will inform Dom Modeste, who will hasten to you, and as the dead man's purse will be found in his pocket, — you understand? It is important for them to find the purse; I tell you this by way of advice, — and as the dead man's purse will be found in one of his pockets, and this letter in the other, there will be no suspicions."

"I understand, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"Furthermore, you will receive a reward instead of having to submit to a punishment."

"You are a great man, dear Monsieur Chicot; I will run to the Priory Saint Antoine."

"Wait a minute, the devil! I said the purse and the letter."

"Ah! yes, and you have the letter?"

"Yes."

"It must not be said that it has been read and copied?"

"By Heaven! It is precisely on account of the letter's being intact that you will receive a reward."

"There is a secret in this letter, then?"

"In these days there are secrets in everything, my dear Bonhomet."

And Chicot, after this sententious reply, put back the silk under the wax of the seal, in the same way as he had taken it off; then he joined the wax so skilfully that the most practised eye could not discover the least break in it.

After this he replaced the letter in the dead man's pocket, had the linen soaked in oil and wine dregs and applied to his wound like a poultice, put on the protecting coat of mail over his skin, his shirt over the coat, picked up his sword, wiped it off, returned it to its sheath, and went away.

Then he came back.

"After all," said he, "if the story I have invented does not seem good to you, you can accuse the captain of having put his own sword through his body."

"A suicide?"

"Yes; that would compromise no one, you understand."

"But they would not bury the poor fellow in consecrated ground."

"Poof!" said Chicot, "would that be any great pleasure for him?"

"Why, yes, I think so."

"In that case act as you would for yourself, my dear Bonhomet. Adieu!"

Then returning a second time:

"By the way," said he, "I will pay the bill, since he is dead."

And Chicot threw three crowns of gold upon the table.

After this he laid his finger on his lips in sign of silence and went away.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE HUSBAND AND THE LOVER.

It was not without deep emotion that Chicot again saw the Rue des Augustins, so calm and so deserted, the angle formed by the block of houses next to his, and finally his own dear house with its triangular roof, its worm-eaten balcony, and its gutters ornamented with waterspouts.

He had been so afraid of finding an empty space in place of his home, he had so feared to find the street blackened by the smoke of a fire, that street and dwelling seemed to him prodigies of neatness, grace, and splendor.

Chicot had hidden the key of his cherished house in a crevice of a stone which served as the base of one of the columns of this balcony. In those days a key of a box or an article of furniture was as heavy and as large as the most ponderous keys of our houses of to-day.

In those days the keys of houses were, following out natural proportions, equal to the keys of modern cities.

Chicot had done away with the difficulty of carrying his beloved key in his pocket, and had hidden it, as we have said.

He felt, therefore, it must be confessed, a slight shudder as he put his fingers into the stone; the shiver was followed by unparalleled joy as he felt the cold iron.

The key was actually in the place in which Chicot had left it.

It was the same with the furniture in the first room and the plank nailed to the beam; moreover, the thousand crowns still slept in their oak hiding-place.

Chicot was not avaricious. On the contrary, he had often thrown gold broadcast, sacrificing the material to the triumph of the idea, which is the philosophy of every man of a certain strength. But when the idea of the predominance of mind over matter had momentarily ceased, that is, when he needed neither money, nor sacrifice, when sensual thought took possession of Chicot's soul, and when this soul allowed the body to live and enjoy; then the first, constant, eternal source of animal pleasures resumed its value in the eyes of our philosopher, and no one knew better than himself into how many savory parcels that inestimable whole called a crown could be divided.

"*Ventre de biche!*" murmured Chicot, bending over the open flagstone in the centre of his room, the plank by his side and his treasure before him; "*ventre de biche!* I have a worthy neighbor in that young man who respected my money and caused others to respect it. Truly that was an act which is above price in these times. By Heavens! I owe this gallant man my thanks and this evening he shall have them."

Whereupon Chicot replaced the plank over the beam, the flag-stone over the plank, approached the window, and looked out.

The opposite house had still that gray, gloomy aspect which the imagination assumes as the natural color of houses of such a character.

"It cannot yet be bedtime," said Chicot, "and besides, those people are not great sleepers, I am sure. Let us see."

He descended to the street and, assuming his pleasantest expression, knocked at his neighbor's door.

He heard a noise on the stairway, then a footfall, yet he was kept waiting long enough to feel himself justified in knocking again.

This time the door opened and a man appeared in the darkness.

"Thanks and good evening," said Chicot, extending his hand, "I have just returned and I have come to thank you, my dear neighbor."

"Pardon me?" said a disappointed voice, the tone of which greatly surprised Chicot.

At the same time the man who had opened the door stepped back.

"Ah! I have made a mistake," said Chicot, "you were not my neighbor when I left home, and yet, God forgive me, I know you!"

"I know you, too," said the young man.

"You are Monsieur le Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges?"

"And you are the Shade?"

"Yes," said Chicot, "I have fallen from the clouds."

"Well, what do you want, monsieur?" demanded the young man, somewhat sharply.

"Pardon me, perhaps I am troubling you, my dear monsieur?"

"No, but you will allow me to ask you, will you not, what I can do for you?"

"Nothing, except that I want to speak to the master of the house."

"Speak, then."

"How so?"

"I am the master of the house."

"You? and since when, I beg you?"

"Well! for three days."

"Ah! The house has been sold, then?"

"Apparently, since I have bought it."

"But the former owner?"

"Lives here no longer, as you see."

"Where is he?"

"I know nothing about him."

"Come, let us understand each other," said Chicot.

"I ask nothing better," replied Ernauton, with visible impatience; "only, let us make haste."

"The former owner was a man twenty-five or thirty years of age, who looked forty."

"No; he was a man sixty-five or sixty-six years old who looked his age."

"Bald?"

"No; on the contrary, he had a shock of white hair."

"There is an enormous scar on the left side of his head, is there not?"

"I did not see the scar, but he had a good many wrinkles."

"I cannot understand all this," said Chicot.

"Well," resumed Ernauton after an instant's silence, "what do you want with this man, my dear Monsieur Shade?"

Chicot was about to tell him what he wanted, but suddenly the mystery of Ernauton's surprise reminded him of a certain proverb dear to discreet men.

"I wanted to pay him a little visit, as is done among neighbors," said he, "that is all."

In this way Chicot neither lied nor admitted anything.

"My dear monsieur," said Ernauton, politely, but closing the door half way, "my dear monsieur, I am sorry, but I am unable to give you any more definite information."

"Thanks, monsieur," said Chicot, "I will ask somewhere else."

"But," continued Ernauton, closing the door still more, "that does not prevent my congratulating myself on the chance which has brought me into contact with you."

"You wish I were in hell, don't you?" murmured Chicot, returning the young man's bow.

In his preoccupation, and in spite of his mental reply, Chicot forgot to withdraw. Ernauton shut the door in his face, saying:

"Until next time, monsieur."

"A moment more, Monsieur de Carmainges," said Chicot.

"Monsieur, I am very sorry," replied Ernauton, "but I can delay no longer; I am waiting for some one who should be here now, and who would be angry with me if I did not use all discretion in receiving him."

"Say no more, monsieur, I understand," said Chicot. "Pardon me for having troubled you. I will retire."

"Adieu, dear Monsieur Shade."

"Adieu, worthy Monsieur Ernauton."

And Chicot stepped back and saw the door closed gently in his face.

He listened to find out if the mistrustful young man was watching for him to leave, but Ernauton went back up the stairs. Chicot returned without anxiety to his house, in which he shut himself up, resolved not to trouble his new neighbor further, but also not to lose sight of him.

Chicot was not the man to sleep on a fact which seemed to him of some importance without having studied, examined, and dissected the fact with the patience of a distinguished anatomist. In spite of himself, and this was either an advantage or a defect in his organism, every idea encrusted in his

brain presented itself with its salient points for analysis, so that the cerebral walls of poor Chicot were wounded and cracked by it, and begged for an immediate examination.

Until then, Chicot had been occupied with the sentence in the letter of the Duc de Guise: "I wholly approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five," but he now abandoned this study, which he promised himself he would resume later, to examine thoroughly the new line of preoccupation which had taken the place of the old. Chicot reflected that it was very strange to find Ernauton installed as master in the mysterious house, the inmates of which had so suddenly disappeared, especially as these former inmates reminded Chicot of a sentence in the letter from the Duc de Guise in regard to the Duc d'Anjou.

That was a chance worthy of notice, and Chicot had a habit of believing in providential chances.

When questioned on this point he even developed very ingenious theories.

The basis of these theories was an idea which in our opinion is well worth another. This was the idea:

Chance is God's reserve.

The All-Powerful allows himself reserve only under serious circumstances, especially as He sees that men are wise enough to study and foresee the chances afforded them by nature and the elements. Now God loves, or ought to love, to baffle the combinations of the proud, whom in the past he punished by drowning, and whom in the future he will punish by burning.

God, then, we say, or rather Chicot said, loves to baffle the combinations of the proud by means of elements unknown to them, the intervention of which they cannot foresee.

This theory, as one can readily see, contains specious arguments, and can furnish brilliant theses; but no doubt the reader is as anxious as was Chicot to know what Carmainges was doing in that house and will be glad if we pause in the development of theories.

Chicot thought it strange to find Ernauton in the house in which he had last seen Rémy. He thought it strange for two reasons: first, because of the absolute ignorance of each concerning the other, from which it might be supposed that there must have been an intermediary unknown to Chicot.

Second, because the house must have been sold to Ernauton, who had no money to buy it.

"It is true," said Chicot, settling himself as comfortably as possible in his gutter, his usual observatory; "it is true that the young man pretends that he is to have a visit, and that this visit is to be made by a woman. Nowadays women are rich and indulge in fancies. Ernauton is young, good-looking, and refined. Ernauton has pleased some one, and a meeting has been suggested; he has been told to buy this house; he has bought it, and agreed to the meeting.

"Ernauton," continued Chicot, "lives at court; so it must be some court lady with whom he is having an affair. Poor boy, will he love her? God forbid! He will fall into a gulf of perdition. Ah! am I not reading him a sermon? a sermon doubly useless and intensely stupid? Useless, because he does not hear it, and if he did hear it he would not listen to it. Stupid, because I would do better to go to bed and to think a little of poor Borromée. By the way," continued Chicot, becoming gloomy, "I perceive one thing, that remorse does not exist and is only relative. The fact is, I have no remorse at having killed Borromée, since the preoccupation which has seized me on account of the position of Monsieur de Carmainges makes me forget that I did kill Borromée. And, on the other hand, if he had nailed me to the table as I nailed him to the wall, he would certainly have no more remorse at this hour than I myself have."

Chicot had reached this point in his reasoning, in his study and his philosophy, which had taken a good hour and a half in all, when he was brought back to himself by the arrival of a litter, coming from the direction of *The Proud Chevalier*. The litter stopped before the mysterious house.

A veiled lady descended and disappeared within the door, which Ernauton held open.

"Poor boy!" murmured Chicot. "I was not mistaken; he was really waiting for a woman; and now I will go to sleep."

Thereupon Chicot rose, but stood motionless.

"I am wrong," said he; "I will not sleep; but I maintain what I said. If I do not sleep it is not remorse which prevents me, but curiosity, and what I say is so true, that if I remain in my observatory I shall think only of one thing, that is, which of the royal ladies honors this handsome Ernauton with her love. It will be better under the circumstances, for me to remain here, for if I go to bed I shall certainly get up and come back."

Thereupon he sat down again.

Almost an hour passed, without our being able to say whether Chicot thought of the unknown lady or Borromée, or whether he was torn by curiosity or stung by remorse, when he heard the gallop of a horse at the end of the street.

Before long a rider appeared, enveloped in a cloak. He stopped in the middle of the street, and seemed to be trying to get his bearings.

Then he perceived the litter and its attendants, and rode towards them. He was armed, for his sword clanked against his spurs.

The attendants attempted to prevent his passing; but he uttered a few words in a low voice, whereupon they not only withdrew respectfully, but one of them, as soon as he dismounted, held the bridle of his horse.

The stranger went to the door and knocked loudly.

"By Heaven!" said Chicot to himself; "I did well to remain! My presentiments told me something would happen, and they were not wrong. Here is the husband. Poor Ernauton! We are going to be present at some murder. However, if it is the husband, he is very good to announce his arrival by such loud knocking."

Notwithstanding the authoritative manner in which the stranger had knocked, those within seemed to hesitate about opening.

"Open the door," cried the man, who had knocked.

"Open, open!" repeated the attendants.

"Yes," said Chicot, "it is the husband; he evidently threatened to have the attendants whipped or hanged, and so they obey him. Poor Ernauton! he will be flayed alive! Oh, oh! if I allow it," added Chicot. "For," he resumed, "he helped me, and consequently, if this occurs, I ought to help him. Now it seems to me that the need will either occur or will not occur."

Chicot was determined and generous as well as curious. He unfastened his long sword, put it under his arm, and hastily descended his stairway. He knew how to open his door noiselessly, which is an indispensable gift to one who wishes to listen to advantage.

Chicot slipped under the balcony behind a pillar and waited.

Scarcely had he taken his position there before the door

opposite him opened at a word the stranger had whispered through the lock. But the latter remained on the threshold.

An instant later the lady came out and took the arm of the cavalier, who led her back to the litter, closed its doors, and remounted his horse.

"No further doubt," said Chicot, "it was the husband, a good sort of husband after all, since he did not look around the house a little to rip open my friend Carmainges."

The litter set out, the cavalier riding at the side.

"By Heaven!" said Chicot, "I must follow these people in order to know who they are and whither they are going. I shall certainly gain some solid facts for my friend De Carmainges."

Chicot followed the litter, taking care to keep in the shadow of the walls, while his footsteps were unnoticed in the noise made by the men and the horse.

Chicot's surprise was not small when he saw the litter stop in front of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Almost immediately, as if some one had been watching, the door opened.

The lady, still veiled, stepped down, entered, and ascended the tower, the window on the first floor of which was lighted. Her husband ascended behind her.

They were both respectfully preceded by Dame Fournichon, who carried a candle in her hand.

"Well," said Chicot, folding his arms, "it is beyond me!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

HOW CHICOT BEGAN TO SEE CLEARLY THROUGH THE LETTER FROM MONSIEUR DE GUISE.

Chicot firmly believed that somewhere he had seen the figure of this complaisant cavalier. But his memory being somewhat confused from his trip to Navarre, where he had seen so many different faces, he could not remember as easily as usual.

While, hidden in shadow, his eyes fixed on the lighted window, he was wondering why this man and woman were holding a tête-à-tête in *The Proud Chevalier*, forgetting

Ernauton in the mysterious house, our worthy Gascon saw the door of the inn open and, in the ray of light which escaped, perceived the black silhouette of a little monk. The silhouette paused an instant to glance at the same window as Chicot was watching.

"Oh, oh!" he murmured, "that is a Jacobin's robe, it seems to me. Is Maître Gorenflot so lax in discipline that he allows his sheep to wander at such an hour of night and at such a distance from the priory?"

Chicot watched the monk while he walked along the Rue des Augustins, and a certain peculiar instinct told him that he would find in this monk the answer to the enigma which until then he had sought in vain.

Moreover, in the same way as Chicot had thought he recognized the figure of the cavalier, so he now thought he recognized the monk by a certain carrying of the shoulders, a certain military strut which belongs only to those accustomed to fencing-rooms and gymnasiums.

"I'll be damned!" he murmured, "if that gown does not hide the little miscreant whom they wanted to give me for a travelling companion, and who handles the musket and the foils so skilfully."

Scarcely had this idea came to Chicot before, in order to make sure of its value, he stretched out his long legs and in ten strides overtook the little brother, who, as he walked, held up his gown above his thin, nervous legs, in order to go the faster.

Moreover, it was not hard to overtake the little monk, as he stopped every now and then to glance behind him, as though it was with great difficulty and regret that he went away.

This look was constantly directed towards the lighted windows of the inn.

Chicot had not gone ten steps before he was certain that he was right in his conjectures.

"Hello, my little brother!" said he; "hello, my little Jacquot! Hello! my little Clement. Halt!"

He pronounced the last word in such a military tone that the little monk gave a start.

"Who calls me?" asked the young man, roughly, in a tone that was more warlike than gentle.

"I!" replied Chicot, drawing himself up before the Jacobin. "Do you recognize me, my son?"

"Oh! Monsieur Robert Briquet!" cried the little monk.

"In person, little one; and where are you going so late, dear child?"

"To the priory, Monsieur Briquet."

"But where are you coming from?"

"I?"

"Certainly, little libertine."

The young man shuddered.

"I do not know what you mean, Monsieur Briquet," he replied, "I was sent on an important mission by Dom Modeste, and he will vouch for me if need be."

"There! there! gently, my little Saint Jerome; we take fire like a match, apparently."

"Is there not cause when one hears things such as you tell me?"

"Well! you see, a gown like yours, coming from a tavern at such an hour"—

"From a tavern, I?"

"Why, yes! Is not the house you have just left *The Proud Chevalier?* Ah! you see that I have caught you!"

"You are right," said Clement, "I did come out of that house, but not out of an inn."

"What!" exclaimed Chicot; "the inn of *The Proud Chevalier* is not an inn?"

"An inn is a place where one drinks, and as I did not drink in that house, that house is not an inn for me."

"The devil! The distinction is subtle, and I am greatly mistaken or some day you will be a great theologian; but still, if you did not go into that house to drink, why did you go at all?"

Clement did not answer, and in spite of the darkness Chicot could read on his face a firm determination to say nothing further.

This resolution disturbed our friend greatly, for he had acquired the habit of finding out everything.

It was not that Clement showed any sharpness in his silence; on the contrary, he had seemed charmed to meet his learned professor, Maître Robert Briquet, so unexpectedly, and had received him with all the enthusiasm that could be expected from his cold, reserved nature.

The conversation dropped completely. In order to renew it, Chicot was on the point of uttering the name of Brother

Borromée, but although he felt no remorse, or thought he felt none, the name died on his lips.

The young man stood silent, apparently waiting for something; one would have said he thought it a happiness to remain as long as possible in the vicinity of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier.*

Robert Briquet strove to speak to him of the trip which they had for an instant hoped to make together. The eyes of Jacques Clement shone at the words "space" and "liberty."

Robert Briquet said that in the countries through which he had just travelled fencing was held in high esteem. He added carelessly that he had even brought back some marvellous thrusts.

This put Jacques on his mettle. He asked what the thrusts were, and Chicot, with his long arm, indicated some of them on the arm of the little brother.

But all these attempts on the part of Chicot did not soften the heart of little Clement, and while trying to parry the unknown blows which his friend Maître Robert Briquet was showing him, he preserved an obstinate silence in regard to what had taken place in the quarter.

Vexed, but still master of himself, Chicot resolved to try injustice. Injustice is one of the most powerful provocations invented to make women, children, and inferiors speak, of whatever nature they may be.

"Never mind, little one," said he, as if returning to his first thought, "never mind, you are a charming little monk; but you go to inns, and such inns too! in which there are beautiful ladies and you pause in ecstasy before the window through which their shadow can be seen. Little one, little one, I shall tell this to Don Modeste."

The blow struck home more directly than Chicot had supposed, for when he began he did not suspect that the wound was so deep.

Jacques turned round like a trodden serpent.

"That is not true!" he exclaimed, crimson with shame and anger. "I do not look at women!"

"Yes, you do," continued Chicot; "and there was a very beautiful lady at *The Proud Chevalier* when you came out, and you turned round to see her again. I know that you were waiting for her in the tower, and I know that you spoke to her."

Chicot was proceeding by induction.

Jacques could not contain himself.

"Of course I spoke to her!" he cried. "Is it a sin to speak to women?"

"No, when we do not speak to them from any impulse of our own, or because we yield to the temptation of Satan."

"Satan has nothing to do with this. I had to speak to this lady because I had a letter to give her."

"From Dom Modeste?" cried Chicot.

"Yes, now go and complain to him!"

For an instant Chicot was puzzled, and began groping in the shade of his thoughts. Then at the last words, he felt a beam of light flash through the darkness of his brain.

"Ah!" said he, "I know about it."

"What do you know?"

"What you are not willing to tell me."

"I do not tell my own secrets, much less those of others."

"Yes, but to me."

"Why to you?"

"I am a friend of Dom Modeste, and then I" —

"Well?"

"I know beforehand all that you can tell me."

The little Jacques looked at Chicot and shook his head with a smile of incredulity.

"Well!" said Chicot; "shall I tell you what you will not tell me?"

"I wish you would," said Jacques.

Chicot made an effort.

"In the first place," said he, "poor Borromée" —

The face of Jacques clouded.

"Oh!" said the youth, "had I been there" —

"Had you been there?"

"The thing would not have happened."

"You would have defended him against the Swiss with whom he quarrelled?"

"I would have defended him against the whole world!"

"So that he would not have been killed?"

"Or so that I might have been killed with him."

"In short, you were not there, so that the poor devil died in a wretched inn, and in dying, uttered the name of Modeste."

"Yes."

"And Dom Modeste was informed?"

"A terrified man brought the news to the convent."

"And Dom Modeste sent for his litter and hastened to the *Corne d'Abondance*."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh! you do not know me, little one. I am something of a sorcerer."

Jacques stepped back.

"That is not all," continued Chicot, who, as he talked, was beginning to see more clearly from the light of his own words. "A letter was found in the dead man's pocket?"

"Yes."

"And Dom Modeste ordered his little Jacques to take this letter to its destination?"

"Yes."

"And little Jacques ran at once to the Hôtel de Guise."

"Oh!"

"Where he found no one."

"Great God!"

"Except Monsieur de Mayneville."

"Mercy!"

"And Monsieur de Mayneville led Jacques to the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*."

"Monsieur Briquet, Monsieur Briquet," cried Jacques, "if you know this" —

"Well, *ventre de biche!* you see very well that I know it," said Chicot, happy at having freed this enigma, so important to him, from the shadowy swaddling-bands in which it was at first wrapped.

"In that case," said Jacques, "you see well enough, Monsieur Briquet, that I am not guilty!"

"No," said Chicot, "you are guilty neither of a sin of commission nor of omission, but you are guilty in thought."

"I?"

"Yes, you think the duchess very beautiful."

"I?"

"And you went back to look at her again through the windows."

"I?"

The little monk blushed and stammered.

"That is true; she resembles a Virgin Mary which hung over my mother's bed."

"Oh!" murmured Chicot, "how many things are lost by people who are not curious."

Then he made the little Clement, whom he now held in his power, tell him everything that he himself had just told; but this time with the details he could not know.

"You see," said Chicot, when he had finished, "what a poor fencing-master you had in Brother Borromée!"

"Monsieur Briquet," said little Jacques, "we must not speak ill of the dead."

"No, but acknowledge one thing."

"What?"

"That Borromée did not fight as well as the one who killed him."

"That is true."

"And now, that is all I had to say to you. Good-night, my little Jacques. We shall meet again, and if you wish" —

"What, Monsieur Briquet?"

"Well, I will give you fencing-lessons."

"Oh! gladly."

"No, go back, little one, for they will be waiting for you impatiently at the priory."

"That is true; thanks, Monsieur Briquet, for having reminded me."

And the monk hastened away.

It was not without reason that Chicot dismissed the lad. He had drawn from him all that he wanted to know, and yet, on the other hand, there still remained something for him to learn. Therefore, with long strides, he returned to his house. The litter, the attendants, and the horse were still before the door of *The Proud Chevalier*. He went noiselessly back to his gutter. The house opposite his was still lighted.

From that moment he had eyes only for that house. In the first place, through a rent in the curtain he saw Ernauton pass back and forth, apparently waiting impatiently for some one.

Then he saw the litter and Mayneville return, and finally he saw the duchess enter the room in which Ernauton was palpitating rather than breathing.

Ernauton knelt down before the duchess, who gave him her white hand to kiss, and bade the young man rise, and sit down opposite her before an elegantly appointed table.

"That is strange," said Chicot; "this began like a conspiracy, and ends like a rendezvous of love! Yes," went on

Chicot, "but who arranged this meeting? Madame de Montpensier?"

Then a new idea flashed across his mind.

"Oh, oh!" he murmured.

"Dear Sister: I approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five; but permit me to say that you are doing those fellows great honor."

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Chicot: "I return to my first idea: it is not love, but a conspiracy. Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier loves Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges: therefore, let us watch the love of Madame la Duchesse."

And Chicot watched until half-past twelve, when Ernauton fled, his cloak over his nose, and Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier returned to her litter.

"Now," said Chicot, descending his stairs, "what is this chance of death which is to deliver the Duc de Guise from the heir presumptive to the crown? Who are the people thought to be dead, but who are still living. By Heaven! I may well be on their traces!"

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE CARDINAL DE JOYEUSE.

Youth has its obstinate tendencies in evil and good which equal the steadier resolution of riper years.

Directed towards good, this obstinacy produces great actions and inspires the man just starting out in life with an impulse which naturally leads him towards some act of heroism.

Thus from having been the most peevish and intractable children ever seen, Bayard and Duguesclin became great captains; thus the swineherd whom Nature made herdsman of Montalte, and whose genius made Sixtus Quintus, became a great pope from having obstinately done his duty poorly as swineherd. So, the worst Spartan natures developed in the direction of heroism, having begun by persisting in dissimulation and cruelty.

We have here but to trace the portrait of an ordinary man; and yet more than one biographer would have found in Henry du Bouchage, at twenty years of age, the material for a great man. Henry persisted in his love and his withdrawal from

the world. As his brother had asked him to do, and as the King had demanded, he remained several days alone with his one thought; then, his determination having become more and more fixed, he decided one morning to pay a visit to his brother the cardinal, a man of importance who, although only twenty-six years of age, had already been cardinal for two years, and who from the archbishopric of Narbonne had risen to the highest plane of ecclesiastical greatness, thanks to the nobility of his family and the strength of his mind.

François de Joyeuse, whom we have already introduced upon the scene in order to throw light upon the doubt of Henry de Valois in regard to Sylla, was young, worldly, beautiful, and spiritual, and one of the most remarkable men of that epoch.

Ambitious by nature, but circumspect by calculation and position, François de Joyeuse might have taken for a motto "*Nothing is too much*," and could have proved it. He alone, perhaps, of all the courtiers, and François de Joyeuse was before all else a courtier, had known how to turn to his aid the two religious and lay thrones, under the jurisdiction of which he lived, as a French gentleman and a prince of the church. Sextus protected him against Henry III., Henry III. against Sextus. He was an Italian in Paris, a Parisian in Rome, magnificent and tactful everywhere. The sword of the grand admiral added weight to François; but it was noticed from certain smiles of the cardinal that if he failed in the mighty temporal weapons which, elegant as he was, were handled so well by his brother, he knew how to use and even abuse the spiritual arms confided to him by the sovereign head of the church. Cardinal François de Joyeuse had quickly grown wealthy, rich in his own patrimony at first, afterwards from his different benefices. In those days the church was largely endowed, and when its funds were exhausted it knew the sources, to-day dried up, from which to renew them.

François de Joyeuse carried on a large establishment. Leaving to his brother the military pride of the house, he filled his antechambers with curates, bishops, and archbishops. He had his specialty. Once cardinal, as he was prince of the church, and consequently superior to his brother, he had engaged pages in the Italian fashion, and guards in the French fashion But these guards and pages were only a greater means of liberty for him. Often he ranged them around a great litter, through the curtains of which the gloved hand of his secretary

was thrust out, while he himself, on his horse, his sword at his side, rode about the city disguised in a wig, an enormous ruff, and riding-boots, the noise of which rejoiced his soul.

Thus the cardinal enjoyed a very great consideration, for at certain elevations human fortunes are absorbing, and, as if they were composed of nothing but adhesive atoms, force all other fortunes to follow them as satellites, and for this reason the glorious name of his father, and the recent and unexpected glory of his brother Anne, threw all their brilliancy on him. Besides, as he had scrupulously followed the precept of hiding his life and scattering abroad his intellect, he was known only by his best side, and even in his family was looked on as a very great man, a happiness not known by many emperors covered with glory and crowned by a whole nation.

It was this prelate that the Count du Bouchage sought after the explanation with his brother, and his conversation with the King of France. But as we have said, he let several days elapse in order to obey the injunction of his elder brother and his King.

François occupied a beautiful house in the Cité. Its immense court was never free from horsemen and litters. But the prelate, whose garden bordered on the river bank, frequently left his gardens and his antechambers with their courtiers, and as there was a door opening on the bank, and near the bank a boat which conveyed him gently and noiselessly as far as he wished, it often happened that they waited in vain for the prelate, whom some grave indisposition or severe penance served as a pretext for not receiving them. This was still a touch of Italy in the heart of the good city of the King of France, it was Venice between the arms of the Seine.

François was proud, but in no way vain; he loved his friends like brothers, and his brothers almost as much as his friends. Five years older than Du Bouchage, he spared him neither good nor bad advice, neither his purse nor his smile.

But as the dress of a cardinal was very becoming to him, Du Bouchage thought him handsome, noble, and almost startling, so that he respected him perhaps more than he respected the eldest brother. Under his beautiful cuirass and his military lace, Henry tremblingly confided his love to Anne, but scarcely dared confess himself to François.

However, as he set out to the cardinal's hôtel, his mind was made up. He frankly met the confessor first, then the friend.

He entered the court, which several gentlemen were just leaving, wearied at having solicited the favor of an audience in vain. He crossed the antechambers, the halls, then the apartments. They told him, as they had told the others, that his brother was holding a conference; but it never occurred to any of the servants to close a door before Du Bouchage.

Du Bouchage therefore passed through the rooms and came to the garden, the real garden of a Roman prelate, with shade, freshness, and perfumes, as are found to-day in the Villa Pamphile or the Borghese Palace. Henry stopped beneath a clump of trees. Just then the gate leading from the river bank creaked on its hinges, and a man entered wrapped in a great brown cloak, and followed by a sort of page.

This man perceived Henry, who was too absorbed in his meditation to think of him, and glided among the trees to avoid being seen either by Du Bouchage or any one else.

Henry paid no attention to this mysterious entrance. It was only on turning that he saw a man going into the house.

After waiting ten minutes, he was about to enter and ask a valet at exactly what hour his brother could be seen, when a servant who apparently was looking for him, saw him, came to him, and begged him to come into the library, where the cardinal awaited him.

At this invitation Henry walked slowly back. He expected a fresh struggle; he found his brother the cardinal, on whom a valet was putting a prelate's gown, somewhat worldly, perhaps, but elegant and above all comfortable.

"Good morning," said the cardinal; "what news, brother?"

"Excellent news so far as our family is concerned," said Henry; "Anne, you know, has covered himself with glory in the retreat from Antwerp, and he is alive."

"And, thank God! you too are safe and sound, Henry."

"Yes, brother."

"You see," said the cardinal, "that God has his plans concerning us."

"Brother, I am so grateful to God that I have decided to consecrate myself to his service. I have come to speak to you seriously about this plan which seems to me to be matured, and about which I have already told you something."

"Are you still thinking of that, Du Bouchage?" said the cardinal, giving vent to a slight exclamation which showed that Joyeuse would have to struggle.

"Still, brother."

"But it is impossible, Henry," replied the cardinal. "Have you not already been told so?"

"I have not listened to what I have been told, brother, because a stronger voice within me prevents my listening to any word which might turn me from God."

"You are not so ignorant of the affairs of the world, brother," said the cardinal, seriously, "as to believe that this voice is really that of the Lord. On the contrary, I tell you, it is a wholly worldly voice that speaks to you. God has nothing to do with this, so do not abuse His holy name, and, above all, do not mistake the voice of earth for that of Heaven."

"I do not confound them, brother; I simply mean that something irresistibly draws me towards retreat and solitude."

"Very good, Henry; now we will come to the point. My dear boy, this is what you must do. I am going to take you at your word, and make you the happiest of men."

"Thanks, oh! thanks, brother."

"Listen to me, Henry. You must take some money, two attendants, and travel through Europe, as is fitting for a son of our house. You will see distant lands, Tartary, Russia, the Laplanders, those fabulous people whom the sun never visits; you will be buried in your thoughts until the consuming germ in you will be killed or warped. Then you will return."

Henry, who had sat down, rose, more serious than his brother had been.

"You do not understand me, monseigneur," said he.

"Pardon me, Henry, you said retreat and solitude."

"Yes, I said that; but by retreat and solitude I meant the cloister, brother, not a journey. To travel is to enjoy life, while I almost wish to suffer death, or if not to suffer it, at least to taste it."

"Permit me to tell you, Henry, that this is an absurd idea, for whoever wishes to isolate himself can be alone anywhere. Now, let it be the cloister. Well! I understand that you have come to me to discuss this plan. I know some very learned Benedictines and some very ingenious Augustins, whose houses are gay, flowery, easy, and comfortable. In the midst of works on science and art you will spend a delightful year in good company, which is important, for one should not grow rusty in this world, and if at the end of a year you persist in your project, well! my dear Henry, I will make no further

opposition, but will myself open the door which will lead you gently to eternal safety."

"You do not exactly understand me, brother," replied Du Bouchage, shaking his head, "or rather your generous intelligence does not wish to understand me; it is not a gay sojourn, a pleasant retreat, that I wish, but the severe cloister, black and dead. I wish to take vows, vows which for all distraction will leave me only a tomb to dig, and a long prayer to make."

The cardinal frowned and rose.

"Yes," said he, "I understood perfectly, but I was trying by my resistance, without set phrases or logic, to combat the folly of your resolutions, but you force me to them. Listen."

"Ah! brother," said Henry, dejectedly, "do not try to convince me, it is impossible."

"Brother, I will speak to you first in the name of God, of the God you offend by saying that this wild idea comes from him. God does not accept hasty sacrifices. You are weak, since you give in to your first grief. How could God be pleased with the almost unworthy victim you offer him?"

Henry made a gesture.

"Oh! I shall spare you no longer, brother, for you spare no one," went on the cardinal; "you forget the grief you are causing your brother and myself."

"Pardon me," interrupted Henry, flushing red, "pardon me, monseigneur; is the service of God so gloomy and dishonorable a career that a whole family should go into mourning? You, brother, you, whose portrait I see in this room, with this gold, these diamonds, this purple, are you not the honor and the joy of our house, although you have chosen the service of God as my elder brother has chosen that of the kings of the earth?"

"Child! child!" exclaimed the cardinal, impatiently, "you will make me believe you have lost your head. What! you compare my house to a cloister, my hundred valets, my outriders, my gentlemen, and my guards to the cell and the broom which are the only weapons and the only wealth of the cloister? Are you mad? Did you not say just now that you set aside these superfluities which are my necessity, pictures, precious vases, pomp, and noise? Have you, like me, the desire and the hope of placing on your brow the crown of Saint Peter? That is a career, Henry; one strives for it, struggles for it, lives for it. But you! you! It is the sap of the miner, it is the spade of the trapper, the tomb of the grave-

digger, that you want. No more air, no more pleasure, no more hope! And all, — I blush for you who are a man, — all because you love a woman who does no love you! Truly, Henry, you are doing an injury to your race!"

"Brother," cried the young man, pale, his eyes shining with a dull fire, "would you prefer me to blow my brains out, or take advantage of the honor I have in carrying a sword to run it through my heart? By Heaven, monseigneur, you are cardinal and prince; give me absolution from this mortal sin, and the thing will be done so quickly that you will not have had the time to finish this ugly and unworthy thought about my dishonoring my race, which, thanks to God, a Joyeuse will never do."

"Come, come, Henry!" said the cardinal, drawing his brother to him, and pressing him in his arms; "come, dear child, beloved by all, forget, and be kind to those who love you. I beg you for myself to listen. We are all happy, which is a rare thing on this earth, some from satisfied ambition, others from all kinds of blessings which God has showered on us. Do not, therefore, I beg you, Henry, hurl the fatal poison of retreat at the head of your family. Think how our father would weep; think how all of us would wear on our brows the black stain of the sorrow you bring on us! I tell you, Henry, to let yourself unbend. The cloister will be of no use to you. I will not say that you will die there, for you would answer me, wretched one, by a too intelligent smile. Alas! no, I will tell you that the cloister is more fatal than the tomb; the tomb kills only life, but the cloister kills intellect; the cloister bows the head instead of lifting it to heaven. Little by little the dampness of the vaults passes into the blood and filters into the bones, to make of the monk one more granite statue for the monastery. Brother, brother, take care; we have only a few years, only one period of youth. Well, the limit of happy youth will pass, for you are under the sway of a great grief. But at thirty you will be a man; the vigor of maturity will come; it will draw with it the remains of worn-out sorrow, and then you will want to live again, but it will be too late, for you will be sad, ugly, and miserable; your heart will no longer know love, your eye will no longer sparkle; those you seek will flee from you as from a whitened sepulchre, the black depths of which are feared by every eye. Henry, I speak to you in friendship and wisdom; listen to me."

The young man stood motionless and silent. The cardinal hoped that he had touched him and shaken his resolution.

"Wait," said he, "try another resource, Henry; this poisoned dart you wear in your heart, carry it everywhere, into the midst of noise, at fêtes, sit with it at our feasts; imitate the wounded doe, which jumps the copse, the thicket, and the bramble bushes, striving to remove from its side the arrow held there by the lips of the wound. Sometimes the arrow falls."

"For pity's sake, brother," said Henry, "do not insist further. What I ask of you is not a passing fancy, not the decision of an hour, it is the result of a slow and painful resolution. Brother, in the name of Heaven I adjure you to grant me the favor I beg of you!"

"Well! what favor do you ask, let us see?"

"A dispensation, monseigneur."

"For what purpose?"

"To shorten my novitiate."

"Ah! I knew it, Du Bouchage, you are worldly even in your austerity, poor friend. Oh! I know the reason you are going to give me. Yes, yes, you are indeed worldly; you resemble those young men who became volunteers, and who are anxious for bullets, shots, but not the work of the trenches and the sweeping of the tents. There is resource in that, Henry; so much the better! so much the better!"

"This dispensation, brother, this dispensation. I beg you for it on my knees."

"I promise it to you. I will write to Rome; but in exchange, promise me one thing."

"What?"

"That during the delay of this month you will refuse none of the pleasures offered you. And if in a month you still persist in your idea, Henry, well, I will give you the dispensation with my own hand. Are you satisfied now, and have you anything else to ask?"

"No, brother, thanks; but a month is so long and delay will kill me!"

"In the meantime, and as a beginning to your distractions, will you breakfast with me? I have good company this morning."

The prelate smiled in a way that the most worldly favorites of Henry III. would have envied.

"Brother"— said Du Bouchage, beginning to excuse himself.

"I will accept no excuse. I am the only one of your family here, since you have just returned from Flanders, and your house cannot yet be ready."

At these words the cardinal rose, and drawing aside a curtain which shut off a large room sumptuously furnished:

"Come, countess," said he, "let us persuade Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage to remain with us."

As the cardinal raised the curtain, Henry saw, half reclining on the cushions, the page who had returned with the gentleman through the gate opening on the river bank, and even before the prelate announced her sex, Henry recognized her as a woman.

Something like a sudden terror, an invincible fear, seized him, and while the worldly cardinal went to take the handsome page by the hand, Henry du Bouchage rushed from the apartment, so that when François brought in the lady smiling in the hope of winning back a heart to the world, the room was completely vacant.

François frowned, and seating himself before a table covered with papers and letters, he hastily wrote a few lines.

"Be kind enough to ring, dear countess," said he, "the bell is under your hand."

The page obeyed.

A trusted valet appeared.

"Let a courier mount instantly," said François, "and take this letter to Monsieur le Grand Admiral, at Château Thierry."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

NEWS FROM AURILLY.

The following day the King was working in the Louvre with his superintendent of finances when he was informed that Monsieur de Joyeuse the elder had just arrived, and was waiting for him in the large audience hall, having come from Château Thierry with a message from Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou.

The King left his work hastily and went to meet this dear friend.

A large number of officers and courtiers filled the room ; the queen mother had arrived that evening, escorted by her maids of honor, and these lively ladies were always surrounded by satellites.

The King gave his hand to Joyeuse, and threw a glance of satisfaction over the assembly.

In a corner of the doorway, in his usual place, stood Henry du Bouchage, rigorously doing his service and his duty.

The King thanked him, and gave a friendly nod, to which Henry replied by a low bow.

This made Joyeuse turn his head and smile from afar on his brother ; but he did not bow too perceptibly for fear of violating etiquette.

" Sire," said Joyeuse, " I am sent to your Majesty by Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, recently returned from the expedition to Flanders."

" Is my brother well, admiral ? " asked the King.

" As well, sire, as the state of his mind permits ; but I will not hide from your Majesty that monseigneur seems to be suffering."

" He will need amusements after his misfortunes," said the King, happy to announce the defeat which had come to his brother while apparently sympathizing with him.

" I think so, sire."

" We have been told, admiral, that the disaster was cruel."

" Sire " —

" But that, thanks to you, a large part of the army was saved. Thanks, admiral, thanks. Does not this poor Monsieur d'Anjou wish to see us ? "

" Ardently, sire."

" Well, we will see him. Are you not of this opinion, madame ? " said Henry, turning to Catharine, whose heart was undergoing all the suffering that her face persisted in hiding.

" Sire," she replied, " I should have gone to my son by myself ; but since your Majesty deigns to join with me in his pledge of good friendship, the journey will be a pleasure trip."

" You will come with us, gentlemen," said the King to the courtiers. " We will leave to-morrow ; I shall sleep at Meaux."

" Sire, shall I go and announce this good news to monseigneur ? "

" No, no ! Leave me so soon, admiral ? no ! I understand that a Joyeuse should be loved by my brother and wanted by him,

but we have two of you, thank God! Du Bouchage, you will start for Château Thierry, if you please."

"Sire," said Henry, "may I be permitted after announcing the arrival of your Majesty to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou to return to Paris?"

"You will do as you please, Du Bouchage," said the King.

Henry bowed and went towards the door. Fortunately Joyeuse was watching him.

"Will you allow me to say a word to my brother, sire?" he asked.

"Certainly. But what is the matter?" asked the King, in a low tone.

"He will burn the pavement to execute the commission, and burn it to return, which will upset my plans, sire, as well as those of Monsieur le Cardinal."

"Go then, and reprimand this mad lover for me."

Anne hastened after his brother and joined him in the antechamber.

"Well!" said Joyeuse, "you are leaving in great haste, Henry."

"Why, yes, brother."

"Because you want to return quickly?"

"Yes."

"Then you do not intend remaining a short time at Château Thierry?"

"The shortest time possible."

"Why?"

"Where there is pleasure going on, brother, is not the place for me."

"On the contrary, Henry, it is just because Monseigneur le Duc de Anjou is to give fêtes at court that you ought to remain at Château Thierry."

"It would be impossible for me to do so, brother."

"Because of your desire for retirement, of your plans for severity?"

"Yes, brother."

"You went to the King to ask for a dispensation?"

"Who told you that?"

"I know it."

"It is true, I went to him."

"You will not obtain it."

"Why not, brother?"

"Because the King would have no interest in depriving himself of such a servant as you."

"In that case my brother the cardinal will do that which his Majesty is unwilling to do."

"All this for a woman!"

"Anne, I beg you not to insist any further."

"Oh! do not worry, I shall not begin again; but for once let us come to the point. You leave for Château Thierry. Well! instead of returning as quickly as you wish, I desire you to wait for me in my apartment. It is a long time since we have been together and I need to be with you, you see."

"Brother, you go to Château Thierry for pleasure. If I stay there I shall poison all your good times."

"Oh, not at all! I can resist and I have a fortunate temperament, perfectly fitted to drive away your melancholia."

"Brother"—

"Count," said the admiral, with imperious insistence, "permit me; in this I represent our father, and I charge you to wait for me at Château Thierry. You will find my apartments there, and they will be yours. They open from the ground floor upon the park."

"If you command, brother," said Henry, with resignation.

"Call it by any name you please, count, wish or command, but wait for me."

"I will do so, brother."

"And I am sure you will not be angry with me," added Joyeuse, pressing the young man to him.

The latter slipped away, somewhat bitterly, perhaps, from his brother's embrace, ordered his horse, and left at once for Château Thierry.

He rode with the anger of a tried man, that is, he devoured space.

That very evening before nightfall he climbed the hill on which Château Thierry was built, with the Marne river at its feet.

At his name, the gates of the château in which the prince lived were opened, but as to an audience, it took more than an hour to obtain one. The prince, some said, was in his apartments; another said he was sleeping. He was composing music, the valet supposed.

But not one of the servants could give a positive answer. Henry insisted in order that he might have nothing further to

think about in regard to the service of the King, and that he might then give himself up wholly to his sadness. At this insistence and as he and his brother were known to be among the most intimate friends of the duke, he was allowed to enter one of the rooms on the first floor, in which the prince at last consented to receive him. A half hour sped by, and night was beginning to fall gently.

The lagging, heavy step of the Duc d'Anjou resounded in the passage. Henry, who recognized it, prepared himself for the customary ceremonial. But the prince, who seemed greatly hurried, quickly dispensed with the formalities of this ambassador by taking him by the hand and embracing him.

"Good day, count," said he. "Why have you inconvenienced yourself to come and see a poor vanquished man?"

"The King sends me, monseigneur, to inform you that he is very anxious to see your highness, and that in order to let you recover from your weariness, his Majesty will visit you in Château Thierry to-morrow, at the latest."

"The King is coming to-morrow!" cried Francis, in a tone of impatience.

Then he added quickly:

"To-morrow! To-morrow! Why really, nothing will be ready either in the château or in the town to receive his Majesty."

Henry bowed like a man who delivers an order, but who has not been commanded to comment on it.

"The great desire of their majesties to see your highness soon prevented their thinking of the inconvenience."

"Well! well!" said the prince, volubly, "it is for me to make the most of the time. I will leave you then, Henry. Thanks for your speed, for you have ridden fast, I see. You must rest now."

"Has your highness no further orders for me?" asked Henry, respectfully.

"Not one. Go and sleep. Dinner will be served in your own rooms, count. I shall not eat this evening; I am in pain, and restless. I have lost my appetite and sleep, which makes my life gloomy, and which you understand I cannot ask any one to share. By the way, you know the news?"

"No, monseigneur; what news?"

"Aurilly has been devoured by wolves."

"Aurilly?" cried Henry, surprised.

"Yes! yes! — devoured! It is strange that all who are near to me die some terrible death. Good-evening, count, sleep well."

And the prince went rapidly away.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

DOUBT.

Henry descended, and as he passed through the antechambers he found a number of officers of his acquaintance who hastened to him, and with a show of affection offered to conduct him to the apartments of his brother, situated in one of the corners of the château.

The duke had given Joyeuse the library to use during his stay at Château Thierry.

Two rooms, furnished in the style of Francis I., opened into each other, and adjoined the library. The latter room looked out on the gardens.

A bed had been prepared in the library for Joyeuse, who had at once idle and cultivated tastes.

By stretching out his hand, he could touch science; by opening the windows he could drink in nature.

Superior organisms need more complete enjoyments, and the morning breeze, the song of the birds, and the perfume of the flowers gave a new charm to the verses of Clément Marot or to the odes of Ronsard.

Henry decided that he would keep everything as it was, not that he was devoid of the poetic sybaritism of his brother, but from a feeling of indifference, and because he did not care whether he was there or elsewhere.

But as the count, no matter in what condition of mind, had been brought up never to neglect his duties to the king or the princes of the house of France, he inquired with the greatest care at the château which had been inhabited by the prince since his return.

This time, chance sent Henry an excellent guide. It was the young ensign whose indiscretion in the little village of Flanders, where our characters made a temporary halt, had betrayed the count's secret to the prince.

The ensign had not left the prince since the latter's return, and could inform Henry perfectly. On arriving at the Château Thierry, the prince had first sought dissipation and noise.

He occupied the state apartments, received morning and night, and during the day hunted the stag in the forest or rode about the park. Since the news of the death of Aurilly, however, which had come to the prince no one knew how, the latter had retired to a pavilion in the midst of the park. This pavilion, a sort of inaccessible retreat except to those well acquainted with the prince, was hidden under the foliage of trees, and could scarcely be seen behind the gigantic elms and through the thick hedges.

It was to this pavilion that the prince had retired two days before. Those who did not know him said that grief caused by the death of Aurilly had plunged him into this solitude. Those who knew him claimed that he was carrying out some shameful or infernal scheme which time would bring to light. Either of these suppositions seemed probable, as the prince was in despair if a visit or a matter of business called him to the château; and as soon as the visit or the business was concluded he returned to his solitude, attended merely by two aged valets who had been with him since he was born.

"If the prince is in this humor," said Henry, "the fêtes will not be gay."

"Assuredly," replied the ensign, "for every one will want to sympathize with the grief of the prince so wounded in his pride and affection."

Henry continued to question, and in spite of himself took a strange interest in everything.

The death of Aurilly, whom he had known at court and whom he had seen in Flanders, the indifference with which the prince had announced his loss to him, the retreat in which the living prince was said to have lived since, — all was attached in his mind, without his knowing how, to the mysterious and sombre web woven by the events of his life.

"They do not know," said he to the ensign, "where the prince heard the news of Aurilly's death?"

"No."

"But," he insisted, "is not something said about it?"

"Oh, no doubt," replied the ensign; "you know, something is always said, whether it is true or false."

"Well! let us hear."

"They say that the prince was hunting under the willows near the river, and that he was apart from the other hunters, for he does everything by fits and starts, and is carried away by hunting in the same way as he is by cards, by battle, and by grief, when suddenly they saw him riding back with a look of consternation on his face. The courtiers questioned him, thinking that it was merely something connected with the hunt. He held in his hand two rolls of gold.

"'Can you understand this, gentlemen?' said he, in a broken voice, 'Aurilly is dead, Aurilly has been devoured by wolves!'

"Every one cried out.

"'Yes,' said the prince, 'it is true, or the devil take me.'

"The poor lute-player was always a better musician than rider. It seems that his horse ran away with him, and that he fell into a quagmire, where he was killed. The following day two travellers passed by this bog, and found a body partially devoured by the wolves. The proof that this happened and that robbers had nothing to do with it is that he had these two rolls of gold with him and that they were carefully brought to the prince.

"Now, as no one was seen bringing these rolls of gold," continued the ensign, "it is supposed they were given to the prince by the two travellers, who met and recognized him on the bank of the river and announced the death of Aurilly."

"It is strange," murmured Henry.

"Much more so," continued the ensign, "because they say — is this true, or an invention? — that the prince opened the small gate of the park by the chestnut trees and admitted two persons, probably the two travellers, into the park. It was after this that the prince moved to his pavilion, and we have not seen him since, except by stealth."

"And no one has seen the two travellers?" asked Henry.

"As I went to ask the prince for the night watchword for the guard of the château," said the ensign, "I met a man who seemed a stranger in the household of his highness, but I could not see his face, as he turned away at sight of me and drew the hood of his coat over his eyes."

"The hood of his coat?"

"Yes, the man looked like a Flemish peasant, and reminded me, I know not why, of the one who accompanied you when we met that day after the flood."

Henry shuddered. The remark emphasized the interest the story inspired in him; to him, too, who had seen Diana and her companion entrusted to Aurilly, the idea had come that he knew the two travellers who had announced the death of the unfortunate lute-player to the prince.

Henry looked closely at the ensign.

"When you thought you recognized this man, what idea came to your mind, monsieur?" he asked.

"This is what I thought," replied the ensign; "but I can be sure of nothing. The prince probably has not given up his ideas concerning Flanders, consequently he employs spies; the man in the woollen overcoat is a spy who in his rounds heard of the accident to the musician, and brought back two pieces of news at the same time."

"That is very likely," said Henry, thoughtfully; "but what was this man doing when you saw him?"

"Walking along by the hedge which borders the pasture, — you can see it from your windows, — and going towards the conservatories."

"And you think the two travellers, for you say there are two" —

"The report is that two entered the gate, but I saw only one, the man in the overcoat."

"Then, according to you, the man in the overcoat lives in the conservatories?"

"Very likely."

"Have the conservatories an exit?"

"Yes, count, on the side of the city."

Henry was silent for a time. His heart beat violently. These details, apparently of so little importance, seemed to him, under the circumstances, to have a double meaning, and were of great interest.

During this conversation night had fallen, and the two young men were talking without a light.

Wearied from the journey, dazed by the strange events which had just been told him, without strength to overcome the emotions which they produced in him, the count had thrown himself on his brother's bed, and lay gazing fixedly at the blue of the sky, which seemed starred with diamonds.

The young ensign was seated on the window ledge, wholly given up to that relaxation of mind, that poetry of youth, that

velvety enervation of comfort caused by the balmy freshness of evening.

A great silence hovered over the park and the city, the gates were closed, by degrees the lights shone forth, dogs barked in distant kennels at the servants, whose duty it was to close the stables at night. Suddenly the ensign rose, raised his hand in token of silence, leaned out of the window, and spoke to the count in a quick, low tone.

"Come here," said he.

"What is it?" asked Henry, starting violently from his meditation.

"The man! the man!"

"What man?"

"The man in the overcoat, the spy."

"Oh!" exclaimed Henry, bounding from the bed to the window, and bending over the ensign.

"See," continued the latter, "do you see him over there by the hedge? Wait, he will reappear. See, look in the spot lighted by the moon. There! there!"

"Yes."

"Is he not sinister?"

"Sinister is the word," replied Du Bouchage, becoming gloomy.

"Do you think he is a spy?"

"I think nothing and everything."

"See, he is going from the prince's pavilion to the conservatories."

"Is the prince's pavilion over there?" asked Du Bouchage, pointing to the place where the stranger had just been seen.

"See that light trembling in the midst of the foliage?"

"Well?"

"That is in the dining-room."

"Ah!" cried Henry, "there he is again."

"Yes, he is certainly going to the conservatories to join his companion. Did you hear that?"

"What?"

"The noise of a key turning in a lock."

"That is strange," said Du Bouchage, "there is nothing peculiar in this, and yet" —

"And yet you shudder, do you not?"

"Yes!" said the count; "but what is that?"

A bell sounded.

"That is the signal for supper in the household of the prince; will you join us, count?"

"No, thanks, I want nothing, and if I feel hungry I will call."

"Do not wait for that, monsieur, but come and be enlivened by our company."

"No, impossible."

"Why?"

"His royal highness practically ordered me to have my supper in my own room; but do not let me detain you."

"Thanks, count, good evening! Keep good watch over our phantom."

"Oh, yes, I promise; unless," continued Henry, fearing he had said too much, "unless I should grow sleepy, which seems to me very likely and much more sensible than watching shades and spies."

"Certainly," said the ensign, laughing.

And he took leave of Du Bouchage. Scarcely had he left the library before Henry hurried into the garden.

"Oh," he murmured, "it is Rémy! it is Rémy! I should recognize him in the gloom of hell."

The young man, feeling his knees tremble under him, placed his cold hands on his burning forehead.

"My God!" said he; "is it not a fancy of my poor affected brain, and is it not written that in sleep as in waking hours, day or night, I shall constantly see these two figures, which have ploughed a furrow through my life? But," he continued, like a man who feels the necessity of convincing himself, "why should Rémy be here in this château with the Duc d'Anjou? What could he be intending to do? What could the Duc d'Anjou have in common with Rémy? How could he have left Diana, he who is her constant companion? No, it is not he."

Then, after a moment, a deep, instinctive conviction mastered all doubt.

"It is he! it is he!" he murmured in despair, leaning against the wall to keep from falling.

As he put into words this thought, dominating, invincible, mistress of all the others, the sharp grating of the lock again was heard, and although the sound was almost imperceptible, his over-excited senses detected it. An indescribable shudder ran through the young man. He listened again.

Such silence reigned about him that he heard the beating of his own heart.

Several minutes elapsed without his seeing anything that he was waiting for.

But in default of eyes, his ears told him that some one was approaching.

He heard the gravel creak under footsteps.

Suddenly the black line of the elm-tree hedge became uneven; it seemed to him that he saw a still darker group moving against this dim background.

"He is returning," murmured Henry. "Is he alone? or is some one with him?"

The figure advanced to where the moon silvered the empty space.

It was when the man in the overcoat, walking in the opposite direction, had crossed this space before that Henry thought he recognized him as Rémy.

This time Henry saw two shadows very distinctly; he could not be deceived.

A death-like chill seized his heart, and seemed to turn him to stone.

The two shadows walked quickly but firmly. The first was wrapped in a woollen overcoat, and again as at first the count thought he recognized him as Rémy.

The second figure, completely enveloped in a man's cloak, defied all analysis.

And yet beneath the cloak Henry thought he guessed what no one could see.

He gave a groan of pain, and, as soon as the two mysterious figures had disappeared behind the hedge, the young man hurriedly slipped behind them, and, gliding from tree to tree, followed the couple he was so anxious to recognize.

"O God!" he murmured, as he walked along, "can I be right? Is it possible?"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

CERTAINTY.

Henry glided along the dark side of the hedge, taking care to make no noise either on the gravel or against the leaves.

Obliged to walk, and as he walked to keep watch, he could not see very well. However, from his appearance, his clothes, and his gait, he still thought he recognized Rémy in the man with the woollen overcoat.

Simple conjectures, more startling to him than any reality, rose in his mind in regard to the companion of this man.

The elm-tree walk led to a tall hedge of thorns, and to the wall of poplars which separated the pavilion of Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou from the rest of the park, and hid it behind a curtain of verdure, in the midst of which, as we have already said, it was entirely lost. Moreover, it was in an isolated corner of the château. There were beautiful little lakes there, dark groves filled with winding paths, and trees, over the summit of which the moon threw cascades of silver light, while below, the shadow was black, opaque, and impenetrable. On approaching this hedge, Henry felt his heart fail him.

In fact, thus boldly to transgress the orders of the prince, and to give himself up to such rashness, was the act, not of a loyal and honest gentleman, but of a cowardly spy, or of a jealous man driven to extremities.

But when on opening the gate which separated the large park from the small, the man made a movement which disclosed his face, and as this face was indeed that of Rémy, the count had no further scruples and went resolutely forward, at any risk whatsoever.

The gate was closed again, but Henry sprang over the fence and continued to follow the prince's strange visitors, who hastened on.

Another cause for terror now assailed him.

At the noise caused by the footsteps of Rémy and his companion on the gravel, the duke left the pavilion.

Henry stepped behind the largest of the trees and waited. He could see nothing, except that Rémy bowed very low, while his companion instead of bowing made a courtesy, and

the duke, transported with joy, offered his arm to the latter as he would have done to a woman.

Then all three turned towards the pavilion, and disappeared within the vestibule, the door of which was closed behind them.

"I must know the end of it," said Henry, "and find a more convenient place from which to see everything without being seen."

He decided on a clump of trees between the pavilion and the fruit-wall, in the centre of which a fountain played. It was an impenetrable hiding-place, for the prince would not visit the water and the bushes at night, in the freshness and humidity which naturally surrounded the fountain.

Hidden behind the pedestal of the statue which surmounted the fountain, by standing erect Henry was able to see what took place in the pavilion, the chief window of which opened exactly in front of him.

As it was supposed no one could or rather would intrude as far as that, no precaution had been taken.

A table was set, elegantly appointed and laden with choice wines in Venetian glasses.

Two seats at this table were waiting for two guests.

The duke advanced towards one, and, dropping the arm of Rémy's companion, pointed to the other, and seemed to ask her to remove her cloak, which, although very comfortable for a nocturnal walk, must have become very uncomfortable when the end of the journey had been reached, especially when this end was supper.

The lady, thus urged, threw her cloak over a chair, and the light of the candles falling on her pale and majestically beautiful face, Henry's frightened eyes at once recognized her.

It was the lady of the mysterious house in the Rue des Augustins, the traveller in Flanders; it was, in short, Diana, whose glance was as fatal as the thrust of a dagger. This time she had on women's clothes, and wore a brocaded gown; diamonds shone on her throat, in her hair, and on her wrists.

Under these jewels the pallor of her face was still more apparent, and in the light which flashed from her eyes one might have thought that the duke, by means of some magic, had evoked the shadow of a woman rather than the woman herself. Had it not been for the support of the statue on which

he had crossed his arms, which were colder than the marble itself, Henry would have fallen backwards into the basin of the fountain.

The duke seemed wild with joy. He gazed at the marvellous creature seated opposite him, who scarcely touched the food before her. From time to time Francis leaned over the table to kiss the hand of his silent and pale guest, who seemed as insensible to these kisses as if her hand had been carved in alabaster, which it resembled in its transparent whiteness.

Now and then Henry gave a start, raised his hand to his forehead, wiped away the icy perspiration which moistened it, and asked himself:

"Is she alive? Is she dead?"

The duke made every effort and employed all his eloquence to unbend that severe brow.

Rémy, the only attendant, for the duke, had sent every one else away, served the two, and occasionally touched his mistress with his elbow as he passed behind her, seeming by this contact to animate and bring her back to life, or rather to a realization of her situation.

Then a flush of crimson would mount to the young woman's forehead, her eyes shot forth fire, she smiled as if some magician had touched an unknown spring of some intelligent automaton and had operated on the mechanism of her eyes of fire, on that of her crimson cheeks, on that of her smiling lips. Then she again relapsed into passivity.

But the prince leaned towards her, and by his passionate words began to warm his new conquest.

Then Diana, who from time to time glanced at the magnificent clock hanging on the wall opposite her above the prince's head, seemed to make an effort over herself and with a smile still on her lips took an active part in the conversation.

In his leafy hiding-place Henry clenched his fists and cursed the whole creation, from the women God had made to God, who had made him.

It seemed to him monstrous and iniquitous that this woman, so pure and so severe, should thus completely give herself up to the prince because he was a prince, and to love because it was gilded in that palace. His horror of Rémy was such that he would have split him open in order to see if such a monster had the blood and the heart of a man.

It was in this paroxysm of rage and scorn that Henry passed

the time so sweetly spent by the Duc d'Anjou over the supper-table.

Diana rang. The prince, heated by the wine and his gallant words, rose from the table to embrace Diana.

Henry's blood boiled within him. He sought at his side for a sword, in his breast for a dagger.

Diana, with a strange smile which certainly until then had not had its equivalent on any face, stopped him.

"Monseigneur," said she, "before rising permit me to share this tempting fruit with your highness."

At these words she extended her hand towards the basket of gold filigree which contained some magnificent peaches, and took one.

Then, unfastening from her waist a charming little knife, the blade of which was of silver and the handle of malachite, she cut the peach in two and offered one half to the prince, who took it and raised it eagerly to his lips as if he were kissing Diana's.

This passionate act had such an effect on him that just as he bit the fruit a cloud seemed to obscure his sight.

Diana looked at him with her clear glance and passive smile.

Rémy, leaning against a pillar of carved wood, also looked on without moving.

The prince raised his hand to his brow, wiped away some drops of perspiration which were gathering there, and swallowed the piece of fruit he had bitten.

The perspiration, no doubt, was the symptom of some sudden indisposition; for while Diana ate her half of the peach, the prince dropped what remained of his upon his plate, and rising with an effort, seemed to ask his beautiful guest to walk in the garden with him. Diana rose, and, without uttering a word, took the arm the duke offered. Rémy watched them, especially the prince, whom the air seemed to revive completely. As she walked, Diana wiped off the little blade of her knife on a handkerchief embroidered with gold, and replaced it in its shagreen case.

In this way they drew near to the thicket in which Henry was hiding. The prince pressed the young woman's arm close to his heart.

"I feel better," said he, "and yet some weight oppresses my brain. I love too much, I see, madame."

Diana picked some jasmine flowers, a bit of clematis, and

two beautiful roses, which carpeted one side of the base of the statue, behind which Henry shrunk back in fright.

"What are you doing, madame?" asked the prince.

"I have always understood, monseigneur," said she, "that the perfume of flowers was the best remedy for dizziness. I am gathering a bouquet in the wish that, coming from me, it will have the magical effect for which I hope."

As she was arranging the flowers, she dropped a rose, which the prince gallantly hastened to pick up.

The movement of Francis was rapid, but not so rapid but that Diana had time to pour on the rose she held a few drops of a liquid from a flask she drew from her breast.

Then she took the rose the prince handed her and put it into her belt.

"This one is for me," said she; "let us exchange."

And for the rose she received from the hands of the prince she held out the bouquet.

The prince took it eagerly, inhaled it with delight, and passed his arm around Diana's waist. But this voluptuous embrace helped to complete the illness of Francis, for his knees bent under him, and he was forced to sit down on a grassy bank near by.

Henry did not lose sight of the two figures; yet he saw Rémy also, waiting in the pavilion for the end of this scene or rather apparently devouring its every detail.

When the attendant saw the prince stagger, he came to the door of the pavilion. Diana, on her part, feeling Francis tremble, sat down beside him on the bank.

This attack lasted longer than the first. The prince's head had fallen forward on his breast; he seemed to have lost the thread of his thoughts and almost the consciousness of his existence, and yet the convulsive movement of his fingers on Diana's hand indicated that he was instinctively following out his love-dream.

Finally he slowly raised his head, and his lips being on a level with Diana's face, he made an effort to touch hers, but the young woman rose as if she had not noticed the movement.

"Are you suffering, monseigneur?" said she, "would it not be better to return?"

"Oh, yes, let us go back!" cried the prince, in a transport of joy. "Yes, yes, thanks!"

He rose staggering, and instead of its being Diana who

SHE DROPPED A ROSE WHICH THE PRINCE GALLANTLY HASTENED TO PICK UP.

leaned on his arm, it was he who leaned on Diana's, and, thanks to this support, he walked more at his ease and seemed to forget the fever and dizziness. Straightening himself suddenly, he pressed his lips to the young woman's neck.

The latter started as if instead of a kiss she had felt the burn of red-hot iron.

"Rémy, a torch!" she cried, "a torch!"

Rémy at once returned to the supper-room and took a candle from a small stand. This he lighted from those on the table, and hurriedly brought it to the door of the pavilion.

"Here it is, madame," said he.

"Where will your highness go?" asked Diana, taking the candle and turning away her head.

"Oh! to my room! to my room! and you will guide me, will you not, madame?" replied the prince, passionately.

"Willingly, monseigneur," said Diana.

Lifting the torch in the air, she preceded the prince. Rémy opened a window at the rear of the pavilion, and the air blew in in such a way that the candle carried by Diana, as though furious, threw its entire flame and smoke upon Francis' face, which was directly in the current.

The two lovers, as Henry thought them, crossed a hallway, reached the apartment of the duke, and disappeared behind the fleur-de-lis drapery which served as a portière.

Henry had seen all that had taken place with increasing fury, and his anger was such that it brought with it thoughts of annihilation. One would have said that strength remained to him only to curse the fate which had imposed so cruel a proof on him.

He came out of his hiding-place exhausted, and with arms hanging down and haggard eye he was about to return half dead to his rooms in the château, when suddenly the curtain behind which he had just seen Diana and the prince disappear was pushed aside, and the young woman hastened to the supper-room and rushed to Rémy, who was standing motionless, as if waiting for her return.

"Come!" said she to him; "come, all is over"—

Both hurried into the garden as though intoxicated, mad, or furious.

At sight of them Henry had recovered all his strength. He sprang in front of them, and suddenly they found him in the middle of the path, standing with folded arms, more terrible in

his silence than he had ever been in his vehemence. In short, Henry had reached such a degree of exasperation that he would have killed any one who dared to say that women were not monsters sent by the devil to corrupt the world.

He seized Diana by the arm and stopped her, in spite of the terrified cry she gave, in spite of the knife which Rémy held to his breast, and which had already broken his skin.

"Oh! you probably do not recognize me," said he, with a horrible gnashing of the teeth. "I am the young man who loved you, and whose love you did not wish to return, because there was no future for you, but only a past. Ah! beautiful hypocrite, and you, you cowardly liar, at last I know you! I know you and I curse you; to one of you I say, 'I despise you,' to the other, 'You make me shudder!'"

"Back!" cried Rémy, in a choking voice; "back! young madman — or"—

"So be it," replied Henry, "finish your work, and kill my body, you wretch, as you have already killed my soul."

"Silence!" murmured Rémy, furious, burying the blade deeper and deeper into the breast of the young man.

But Diana pushed Rémy's arm violently aside, and grasping that of Du Bouchage, brought him face to face with her.

She was lividly pale. Her beautiful hair was stiff, as it lay on her shoulders. As her hand touched his breast Henry felt it was as cold as that of a corpse.

"Monsieur," said she, "do not rashly judge the affairs of God! I am Diana de Méridor, the mistress of Monsieur de Bussy, whom the Duc d'Anjou allowed to be killed in such a terrible manner, when he could have saved him. Eight days ago Rémy stabbed and killed Aurilly, the prince's accomplice. As to the prince himself, I have just poisoned him with some fruit, a bouquet, and a candle. Stand aside, monsieur! stand aside for Diana de Méridor, who is on her way to the Convent of the Hospitallers."

As she uttered these words she dropped Henry's arm and took that of Rémy, who was waiting for her.

Henry fell on his knees, then backwards, gazing after the two frightful assassins, who disappeared in the depths of the thicket like an infernal vision.

It was not until an hour later that the young man, overcome with fatigue, overwhelmed with terror, his head on fire, suc-

ceeded in regaining sufficient strength to drag himself to his own rooms.

He had to make ten attempts before he could enter by the window. He took a few steps in his room and then fell, staggering, upon the bed.

Every one in the château was asleep.

CHAPTER XC.

FATALITY.

The following morning, about nine o'clock, the sun was powdering the paths of Château Thierry with gold.

A number of laborers, having received orders the previous evening, had begun at dawn to prepare the park and the apartments for the reception of the King, who was expected. Nothing, however, was stirring in the pavilion in which the duke was resting, for the night before he had forbidden his two old servants to waken him. They were to wait until he should summon them.

Towards half-past nine two couriers, riding at full speed, entered the city, and announced the expected arrival of his Majesty. The sheriff, the governor, and the garrison formed ranks on either side of the road along which the procession was to pass.

At ten o'clock the King appeared at the foot of the hill. He had mounted a horse at the last relay. Being a fine rider, this was an opportunity of which he always took advantage, especially when he entered cities. The queen-mother followed in a litter. Fifty gentlemen, richly dressed and well mounted, rode in their suite.

A company of guards, commanded by Crillon himself, a hundred and twenty Swiss, as many Scotch, commanded by Larchant, and the entire household of the King, mules, coffers, and valets, formed an army, the ranks of which followed the winding road which rose from the river to the summit of the hill.

At length the procession entered the city to the ringing of bells, the firing of cannon, and music of every description. The shouts of the inhabitants were enthusiastic. The King appeared

so seldom in those days that, seen near by, he still seemed to have retained a ray of divinity. As he rode through the crowd, he sought in vain for his brother. He found only Henry du Bouchage at the gate of the château.

Once inside, Henry III. asked after the health of the Duc d'Anjou from the officer who had taken it on himself to receive his Majesty.

"Sire," replied the latter, "for several days his highness has been occupying the pavilion in the park, and we have not seen him this morning. However, it is probable that, as he was well yesterday, he is well to-day."

"This pavilion in the park must be a very retired spot, it seems to me," said Henry, displeased, "for a cannon not to be heard there."

"Sire," ventured one of the two servants of the duke, "perhaps his highness did not expect your Majesty so early."

"Old fool," growled Henry, "do you suppose that a king comes to visit people without notifying them beforehand? Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou has known of my expected arrival since yesterday."

Then, fearing to sadden every one by a careworn manner, and wishing to appear gentle and kind at the expense of Francis, he said:

"Since he does not come to us, let us go to him."

"Show us the way," said Catharine, from her litter.

The entire escort took the road to the ancient park.

Just as the first guard reached the hedge of elm trees a piercing and lugubrious cry rent the air.

"What is that?" exclaimed the King, turning towards his mother.

"My God!" murmured Catharine, endeavoring to read an explanation on every face; "it is a cry of distress or despair."

"My prince! my poor duke!" cried the other old servant of Francis, appearing at one of the windows, with gestures of the most violent grief.

Every one hastened to the pavilion, the King urged on by the others.

He reached there just as they were raising the body of the Duc d'Anjou, found on the floor of his bedroom by his valet, who had entered without orders to announce the arrival of the King.

The prince was cold and stiff, and showed no sign of life,

except a strange movement of the eyelids and a grinning contraction of the lips.

The King paused on the door-sill and the others behind him.

"This is a bad omen!" he murmured.

"Retire, my son," said Catharine, "I beg you."

"Poor Francis!" said Henry, glad to be sent away, and so to escape the agonizing sight.

The entire suite followed the King.

"Strange! strange!" murmured Catharine, kneeling down by the prince's body without other company than that of the two aged servants.

Search was at once begun for a physician, and a courier was despatched to Paris, in order to hasten the coming of the King's doctors, who were at Meaux with the Queen. Meanwhile the queen mother made a diagnosis — less scientific perhaps, but as intelligent as Miron himself could have made — of the strange malady to which her son had succumbed.

The Florentine had had experience. Therefore, first of all she questioned coldly and without embarrassing them, the two servants, who in their despair were tearing their hair and disfiguring their faces.

Both said that the prince had returned the evening before at nightfall, having been very inopportunely disturbed by Monsieur Henry du Bouchage, who had come from the King. They added that after this audience, held in the large château, the prince had had a light supper, had given orders that no one should come to the pavilion unless summoned, and had said positively not to waken him in the morning, nor to enter his room unless sent for.

"He expected some mistress, no doubt?" said the queen mother.

"We think so, madame," replied the valet, humbly, "but discretion prevented us from making sure of it."

"In clearing away the table, however, you must have seen whether my son had his supper alone."

"We have not yet removed the dishes, madame, since the orders of monseigneur were that no one should enter the pavilion."

"Good," said Catharine; "then no one entered?"

"No one, madame."

"You may retire."

Catharine was entirely alone.

Leaving the prince on the bed where they had laid him, she began a minute examination of each of the symptoms or traces which she thought might be the possible result of her suspicions or fears.

She had seen that the forehead of Francis had changed to a dark color, his eyes were blood-shot and surrounded by blue circles, his lips, ploughed by a furrow like that made by burning sulphur.

She had found the same mark on his nostrils and the sides of his nose.

"Let us see," said she, looking around the prince.

The first thing she noticed was the candlestick in which was the burned candle lighted the previous evening by Rémy.

"This candle evidently burned a long time," said she; "so Francis must have come to his room early. Ah! here is a bouquet on the floor"—

Catharine hastily picked it up, then, seeing that the flowers were still fresh except one rose which was black and withered:

"What is this?" she murmured. "What has been poured over the leaves of this flower? It seems to me I know a liquid which withers roses in this way."

She threw down the bouquet with a shudder.

"That explains the condition of his nostrils and the flesh on his forehead; but his lips?"

Catharine hurried to the dining-room. The valets had told the truth. Nothing showed that the table had been touched since the close of the meal.

On the edge of the table half of a peach, in which a row of teeth were imprinted, particularly attracted Catharine's attention.

This fruit, at heart so red, was as black as the rose, and was steaked on the inside with purple and brown.

The corrosive action was more especially visible on the cut, in the place where the knife had passed.

"Now for the lips," said she; "but Francis had bitten only a mouthful of the fruit. He had not held the flowers very long in his hand. The evil is not without a remedy, the poison cannot have penetrated deeply. But then, if it has acted only slightly, why is the paralysis so complete and the work of decomposition so advanced? I cannot have seen everything."

As she uttered these words, Catharine looked about her,

and saw suspended from its rosewood perch, by its silver chain, the red and blue paroquet of which Francis had been so fond.

The bird was stiff and dead; its wings bristled.

Catharine turned her anxious gaze to the candlestick, which she had already once examined, to make sure from its complete combustion that the prince had returned to the château early.

"The smoke!" said Catharine to herself, "the smoke! The wick of the candle was poisoned! My son is dead!"

She gave a call. The room was immediately filled with servants and officers.

"Miron! Miron!" cried some.

"A priest!" cried others.

In the meantime Catharine held one of the flasks she always carried in her bag to the lips of Francis, and studied his features to judge the effect of the counter poison.

The duke could still open his eyes and mouth, but no intelligence shone in the former, no voice came from his throat. Gloomy and silent, Catharine left the room, motioning to the two servants to follow her before speaking to any one. She led them to another pavilion, where she sat down, holding both by her glance.

"Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou," said she, "was poisoned by something he had for supper; you served this supper, did you not?"

At these words the pallor of death spread over the faces of the two men.

"Let us be tortured," said they, "or killed; but do not accuse us."

"You are simpletons. Do you suppose that if I suspected you that would not have been done already? I know very well you did not poison your master; but some one did, and I must discover the murderer who entered the pavilion."

"An old man shabbily dressed whom monseigneur received two days ago."

"But — the woman?"

"We did not see her — What woman does your majesty mean?"

"A woman came with a bouquet" —

The two servants looked at each other in such simplicity that by this one glance Catharine recognized their innocence.

"Send the mayor of the city and the superintendent of the château to me," said she.

The two valets hastened to the door.

"One moment!" said Catharine, detaining them by this one word. "You and I are the only ones who know what I have just told you. I shall not mention it; therefore, if any one hears of it, it will be through one of you. If that happens you will both die; now go!"

Catharine questioned the mayor and the superintendent less openly. She told them that the duke had received bad news about a certain person, which had affected him deeply, and which was the cause of his malady, and that by questioning the persons again the duke no doubt would recover from his alarm.

The city, the park, and the neighborhood were all searched, but no one could tell what had become of Rémy and Diana. Henry alone knew the secret, and there was no fear of his revealing it.

All day the startling news was commented on, exaggerated, and mutilated, as it spread through Château Thierry and the province.

Every one, according to his character and his feeling, explained the accident which had happened to the duke. But no one except Catharine and Du Bouchage admitted that the duke was a dead man. The unfortunate prince did not recover his voice nor his feeling, or, to express it better, he gave no further sign of consciousness.

The King, worried by lugubrious impressions which he feared more than anything else, would have liked to return to Paris; but the queen mother opposed his leaving, and the court was forced to remain at the château. Physicians arrived in large numbers. Miron alone guessed the cause of the malady and understood its seriousness; but he was too clever a courtier not to withhold the truth, especially after he had consulted Catharine's eyes.

He was questioned on all sides, and he replied that without doubt Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou had experienced deep grief and had sustained a violent shock. He did not compromise himself, a difficult thing to avoid in such a case. When Henry III. asked him to answer "yes" or "no" to the question "Will the duke live?" the physician answered:

"I will tell your Majesty in three days."

"And what will you tell me?" said Catharine in a low tone.

"You are different, madame; I should answer you without hesitation."

"What would you answer?"

"What question does your majesty ask me?"

"What day will my son die, Miron?"

"To-morrow evening, madame."

"So soon?"

"Ah! madame," murmured the physician, "the dose was much too strong."

Catharine placed her finger on her lips, looked at the dying man, and, in a low tone, repeated the sinister word:

"Fatality!"

CHAPTER XCI.

THE HOSPITALLERS.

The count passed a terrible night in a state verging on unconsciousness or death.

However, faithful to his duties, as soon as he heard the arrival of the King announced, he rose and received him at the gate as we have said; but, having presented his respects to his Majesty, saluted the queen mother, and pressed the admiral's hand, he shut himself in his room, not with any intention of killing himself, but with the determination of carrying out his project, which nothing now could prevent.

About eleven o'clock in the morning the terrible news was circulated that the Duc d'Anjou was dead. Every one had disappeared, leaving the King completely stunned at the sudden event, when Henry knocked at his brother's door. Joyeuse, who had spent part of the night on the highway, had just returned to his apartments.

"Ah! is it you?" asked the latter, half asleep; "what do you want?"

"I have come to bid you good-by, brother," replied Henry.

"What! good-by? You are going away?"

"Yes, brother, I am going away. There is nothing to detain me here any longer, I suppose."

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing; since the fêtes at which you desired me to

be present have not taken place, I am released from my promise."

"You are mistaken, Henry," replied the grand admiral; "I will not allow you to leave to-day, any more than I let you go yesterday."

"Very well, brother. But in that case, for the first time in my life, I shall have the pain of disobeying your orders and of lacking in respect, for from this moment I declare to you, Anne, that nothing can prevent my becoming a monk at once."

"But the dispensation from Rome?"

"I shall wait for it in the monastery."

"Really, you are decidedly mad," cried Joyeuse, rising, amazement depicted on his countenance.

"On the contrary, my dear and honored brother, I am the saner of us, for I alone realize what I am doing."

"Henry, you promised us a month."

"Impossible, brother."

"Wait just eight days."

"Not one hour."

"But you are suffering, poor boy."

"On the contrary, I am no longer suffering. That is why I see that my pain is irremediable."

"But, my friend, this woman is not made of bronze. One can move her, touch her. I will bend her."

"You cannot do the impossible, Anne. Besides, should she allow herself to be turned now I should not consent to love her."

"Come, the mystery deepens."

"It is true, brother."

"What! if she wanted you, you would no longer have her? Why, this is madness, by Heaven!"

"Oh! no indeed," cried Henry, with a gesture of horror. "There can no longer be anything between this woman and myself."

"What do you mean?" asked Joyeuse in surprise. "Who is this woman? Come, speak, Henry. You know very well we have never had secrets from each other."

Henry feared that he had said too much, and that by giving way to the feelings he had just shown he had given his brother a means of discovering the terrible secret hidden in his heart. He, therefore, went to the other extreme, and as often happens in such a case, to cover the rash speech which had just escaped him, he uttered one still more imprudent.

"Brother," said he, "do not urge me further; this woman cannot belong to me, because she already belongs to God."

"Mere talk. This woman a nun? She has lied to you, then."

"No, brother, this woman has not lied to me. She is a Hospitaller. Let us talk no more about it, but let us respect all who throw themselves into the arms of the Lord."

Anne had sufficient control over himself not to show Henry the joy that this revelation caused him. He went on:

"This is news. You have never told me of it."

"It is news, indeed, for she has recently taken the veil, but I am certain that her resolution, like mine, is irrevocable. So keep me here no longer, brother. Embrace me as you love me, let me thank you for all your kindness, all your patience, all your infinite love towards a poor madman, and farewell."

Joyeuse looked at his brother like a man deeply affected, who relies on this show of feeling to persuade the other.

But Henry remained unmoved, and replied by his sad and eternal smile. Joyeuse embraced his brother, and let him start.

"Go," said he to himself, "but all is not yet finished, and, impatient as you are, I shall soon overtake you."

He sought the King, who was breakfasting in bed, with Chicot beside him.

"Good morning! good morning!" said Henry to Joyeuse; "I am very glad to see you, Anne. I feared you would stay in bed all day, lazy one! How is my brother?"

"Alas, sire, I know nothing about him; I have come to talk to you about mine."

"Which one?"

"Henry."

"Does he still want to be a monk?"

"More than ever."

"And take the vows?"

"Yes, sire."

"He is right, my son."

"Why so, sire?"

"Yes, one reaches Heaven quickly by that road."

"Oh!" said Chicot to the King, "one reaches it more quickly still by the road your brother is taking."

"Sire, will your Majesty permit me to ask a question?"

"Twenty, Joyeuse, twenty! I am bored to death at Château Thierry, and your questions will distract me somewhat."

"Sire, do you know all the religious sects in the kingdom?"

"As well as I know heraldry, my dear fellow."

"What are the Hospitallers, if you please?"

"They are a small order, very distinguished, very rigid, and very severe, composed of twenty lady canonesses of Saint Joseph."

"Do they take the veil?"

"Yes, as a favor and on the presentation of the Queen."

"Will it be indiscreet to ask you where their order is situated, sire?"

"Not at all; it is in the Rue du Chevet Saint Landry, in the city, behind the church of Notre Dame."

"In Paris?"

"In Paris."

"Thanks, sire."

"But why the devil do you ask me that? Has your brother changed his mind, and does he wish to become a Hospitaller now instead of a friar?"

"No, sire, I should not think he was as foolish as that, after all your Majesty did me the honor of telling me: but I suspect that his head has been turned by some one in this order. Consequently I want to find out who it is and speak to her."

"By Heaven!" said the King, with a self-satisfied air, "about seven years ago I knew a mother superior who was very beautiful."

"Well, sire, perhaps she is the one."

"I do not know; from that time, Joyeuse, I too have been something of a monk."

"Sire," said Joyeuse, "at all events give me, I beg, a letter to this mother superior and leave of absence for two days."

"You are going to leave me?" exclaimed the King, "you are going to leave me all alone here?"

"Ungrateful one!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "am I not with you?"

"My letter, if you please, sire," said Joyeuse.

The King sighed, but began to write.

"You have nothing to do in Paris?" said Henry at last, handing him the letter.

"Pardon, sire, I shall escort or at least watch over my brother."

"That is right; go now and come back quickly."

Joyeuse did not wait for a repetition of this permission;

he quietly ordered his horses, and finding that Henry had already left, he set out at a gallop towards his destination.

Without stopping to remove his riding-boots, the young man went straight to the Rue du Chevet Saint Landry.

This street ended in the Rue d'Enfer and the Rue des Marmouzets, which was parallel with it.

A dark old house, behind the walls of which the high tops of some trees were visible; windows few and barred, and a small wicket door, — such was the exterior of the Convent of the Hospitallers. On the keystone of the porch a rough artist had cut out these Latin words with a chisel:

Matronæ Hospites

Time had half worn away the inscription and the stone.

Joyeuse knocked at the wicket and ordered his horses brought into the Rue des Marmouzets, for fear that their presence in the street would make too great a noise.

Then knocking at the grating of the tower:

"Kindly inform the mother superior," said he, "that Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse, Grand Admiral of France, wishes to speak with her on the part of the King."

The face of the nun who had appeared behind the grating turned red under her veil, and the door was again closed.

Five minutes later the door again opened and Joyeuse entered the reception-room.

A tall and beautiful woman gave him a low bow, which the admiral returned, with the air of a churchman as well as that of a courtier.

"Madame," said he, "the King knows that you are about to admit or that you have already admitted among your probationers a lady to whom I must speak. Kindly let me meet her."

"Monsieur, the name of this lady, if you please?"

"I do not know it, madame."

"Then how can I grant your request?"

"Nothing is easier. Whom have you admitted during the past month?"

"You do not describe the lady fully enough; therefore I cannot grant your request."

"Why not?"

"Because until this morning I had received no one for one month."

"This morning?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc, and you see that your arrival, following only two hours after hers, looks too much like a pursuit for me to grant you permission to speak to her."

"Madame, I beg you."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"Just point out this lady to me."

"Impossible, I tell you. Besides, although your name sufficed for you to gain admission into my house, an order from the King is necessary to speak with any one here except myself."

"Here is the order, madame," replied Joyeuse, showing the letter which Henry had written for him.

The mother superior read it and bowed.

"The wish of his Majesty shall be carried out," said she, "even though it is contrary to the will of God."

They went towards the courtyard.

"Now, madame," said Joyeuse, stopping her courteously, "you see that I have the right: but I am afraid I may make a mistake. Perhaps this lady is not the one for whom I am looking. Kindly tell me how she came, why, and by whom she was accompanied?"

"All that is needless, Monsieur le Duc," replied the mother superior; "you will not make any mistake, and the lady who arrived this morning, after having been expected for fifteen days, and who was recommended to me by a person who has great authority over me, is without doubt the lady with whom you want to speak."

At these words the mother superior made another bow to the duke and withdrew. Ten minutes later she returned accompanied by a hospitaller whose veil completely hid her face. It was Diana, who had already taken the habit of the order. The duke thanked the mother superior, placed a stool for the strange lady, and sat down himself. The mother superior withdrew, and closed the doors of the dark, deserted parlor.

"Madame," said Joyeuse, without other preamble, "you are the lady of the Rue des Augustins, the mysterious woman whom my brother, the Count du Bouchage, loves so madly and fatally."

The hospitaller bent her head in answer, but did not speak. This affectation seemed to Joyeuse uncivil. He was already ill disposed towards the woman. He continued:

"Did you suppose, madame, that it was enough to be beautiful, or to seem beautiful? to have no heart hidden beneath this beauty, to rouse a hopeless passion in the heart of a young man of my name, and to say to this man, 'so much the worse for you if you have a heart; I have none nor do I want one'?"

"I did not say that, monsieur, and you have been wrongly informed," said the lady in a tone so dignified and so touching that the anger of Joyeuse was softened for an instant.

"The words do not alter the meaning, madame. You repulsed my brother and you have driven him to despair."

"Innocently, monsieur, for I always tried to keep Monsieur du Bouchage at a distance."

"That is called the art of coquetry, madame, and the result shows the fault."

"No one has any right to accuse me, monsieur. I am guilty of nothing. You are angry with me; therefore I will say no more."

"Oh! oh!" said Joyeuse, growing excited by degrees; "you have ruined my brother, and you think to justify yourself by this provoking majesty? No, no; the step I am taking ought to enlighten you as to my intentions. I am serious, I swear to you, and you can see from the trembling of my hands and my lips that you will need good arguments to turn me."

The hospitaller rose.

"If you have come to insult a woman," said she, with the same coolness; "insult me, monsieur; if you have come to make me change my mind, you will lose your time; therefore, leave."

"Ah! you are no human creature," cried Joyeuse, exasperated; "you are a demon!"

"I have told you that I will say nothing more; as that is not enough, I will withdraw."

And the hospitaller turned towards the door.

Joyeuse stopped her.

"Ah! one moment! I have sought you too long to lose you in this way; and since I have succeeded in finding you, since your indifference confirms me in the idea I already had that you are an infernal creature, sent by the enemy of mankind to ruin my brother, I will see your face on which destruction has written its blackest threats. I will see the fire of the fatal glance which sends wits astray. Between us two, Satan!"

Joyeuse made the sign of the cross with one hand in the

manner of exorcism, and with the other snatched the veil which covered the lady's face. The latter, mute, impassible, without anger or reproach, fixed her pure, gentle glance on the man who had thus cruelly outraged her.

"Oh! Monsieur le Duc," said she, "what you have done is unworthy of a gentleman!"

Joyeuse was cut to the heart. This appeal to his manliness softened his anger; so much beauty turned his head.

"You are indeed beautiful," said he after a long silence, "and Henry must have loved you. But God gave you beauty only to scatter it like a perfume over an existence attached to yours."

"Monsieur, you have not spoken to your brother, or if you have spoken to him, he has not thought it wise to make you his confidant. Otherwise he would have told you that I have done as you say; I have loved. I shall never love again; I have lived and I must die."

Joyeuse had not turned his eyes from Diana; the fire of her piercing glance had penetrated to the depths of his soul, like volcanic jets of fire which melt statues of bronze by merely passing near them.

This ray consumed all animal matter in the heart of the admiral; pure gold alone burned there, and his heart burst like a crucible under the fusion of metal.

"Oh! yes," said he again, in a lower tone, still keeping fixed on her a glance in which the fire of anger was abating more and more. "Oh, yes, in spite of himself Henry must have loved you. Oh! madame, in pity, on my knees I beg you, madame, love my brother!"

Diana remained cold and silent.

"Do not reduce a family to agony; do not ruin the future of our race; do not make one die of despair, the others of regret."

Diana did not answer, but continued to gaze sadly at the suppliant kneeling before her.

"Oh!" cried Joyeuse, pressing his heart furiously with his nervous hand; "oh, have pity on my brother, have pity on me! I am on fire! that look of yours has consumed me! Farewell, madame, farewell!"

He rose like a madman, turned or rather tore away the locks from the door of the reception-room and fled half-crazed to his attendants, who were waiting for him at the corner of the Rue d'Enfer.

CHAPTER XCII.

HIS HIGHNESS MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC DE GUISE.

On Sunday, the tenth of June, about eleven o'clock, the entire court was assembled in the room next to the one in which, since his meeting with Diana of Méridor, the Duc d'Anjou had been slowly but surely dying.

Neither the skill of the physicians, nor the despair of his mother, nor the prayers ordered by the King, had averted the fatal event.

On the morning of June the tenth Miron had announced to the King that the malady was incurable and that Francis d'Anjou would not live through the day.

The King had affected great grief, and, turning toward those present:

"This will raise the hopes of my enemies," said he.

To which the queen mother had replied:

"Our destiny is in the hands of God, my son."

Chicot, who was standing humble and contrite near King Henry III., added in a low tone:

"Let us assist God when we can, sire."

Nevertheless, about half-past eleven the duke lost his sight. His mouth, which had been open until then, closed. The flow of blood which for several days had frightened those present, as the bloody perspiration of Charles IX. once caused terror, suddenly stopped, and his extremities became cold.

Henry was sitting at the head of his brother's bed. Catharine, with one icy hand on the dying man, stood at the side.

The Bishop of Château Thierry and the Cardinal de Joyeuse read the prayers for the dying, which were repeated by those present, kneeling and with folded hands.

Towards noon the sick man opened his eyes. The sun came out from behind a cloud and wrapped the bed in an aureola of gold.

Francis, who until then had been unable to move a single finger, and whose consciousness had been veiled like the sun which had come out, raised one arm towards Heaven with a gesture of terror.

He looked about him, heard the prayers, realized his illness and weakness, comprehended his condition, perhaps because he

already saw that obscure and gloomy world to which certain souls go on leaving the earth.

Then with a great cry he struck his forehead with a force which sent a shudder through the whole assembly, and frowned as if he had just read in his mind one of the mysteries of his life.

"Bussy!" he murmured; "Diana!"

No one except Catharine heard the last word, so weak was the voice in which the dying man had uttered it.

After pronouncing this name Francis d'Anjou heaved his last sigh.

At that instant, by a strange coincidence, the sun, which had been gilding the escutcheon of France and the gold fleurs-de-lis, disappeared; so that the fleurs-de-lis, so bright an instant before, became as dark as the azure which they had lately brightened by a constellation almost as resplendent as that which the eye of the dreamer seeks in the sky.

Catharine dropped the hand of her son.

Henry III. shuddered and leaned trembling on the arm of Chicot, who shuddered also, from the respect which every Christian owes the dead. Miron held a gold dish to Francis' lips, and after a few seconds looked at it.

"Monseigneur is dead," said he.

A long groan rose from the ante-chamber, like the accompaniment of the psalm which the cardinal was reading.

"*Cedant iniquitates meæ ad vocem deprecationis meæ.*"

"Dead!" repeated the King, making the sign of the cross from the depths of his armchair; "my brother! my brother!"

"The sole heir to the throne of France," murmured Catharine, who had already left the bedside of the dead and was standing by her one remaining son.

"Oh!" said Henry; "the throne of France is very wide for a king without posterity; the crown is very large for one head alone. No children — no heirs! Who will succeed me?"

As he uttered these words, a great noise was heard on the stairs and in the room. Nambu hastily entered the death-chamber and announced:

"His highness Monseigneur le Duc de Guise."

Struck by this answer to the question he had addressed to himself, the King turned pale, rose, and looked at his mother.

Catharine was paler than her son. At the announcement of the horrible misfortune which chance had foretold to her

race, she seized the King's hand and pressed it, as if to say to him,

"Here is the danger — but fear nothing, for I am with you!"

Mother and son felt the same terror and the same foreboding.

The duke entered, followed by his captains. He held his head erect, although his eyes sought the King or the deathbed of his brother, with a certain embarrassment. Henry III., standing with the supreme majesty which perhaps his strangely poetic nature alone showed in certain moments, stopped the duke by a sovereign gesture, and indicated to him the royal corpse on the bed disordered by the last agony.

The duke bent his head and gently knelt down.

Every one about him bent his head and knelt.

Henry III. alone remained standing with his mother, his eyes for the last time shining with pride.

Chicot noticed this look, and murmured in a low tone this other verse of the Psalms: "*Dejiciet potentes de sede et exaltabit humiles.*"

("He will cast down the proud from their throne, and will exalt those who humble themselves.")

END.